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"A strong piece of pen picturing, with clever sketches of life, and frequent bits of fine character drawing."

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY, NEW YORK.

THE JAY-HAWKERS

*A STORY OF FREE SOIL AND
BORDER RUFFIAN DAYS*

BY

ADELA E. ORPEN

AUTHOR OF *PERFECTION CITY*, ETC.



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THE JAY-HAWKERS

CHAPTER I

THE RENDEZVOUS

A HAZY autumn afternoon, with a bright sun sending slanting rays of shimmering light across the wide-stretching prairie; a lazy brown horse plodding along, while his rider lurched sleepily from side to side as if dozing in the saddle, and nothing else to be seen as far as the eye could reach. The horizon was like the open sea, limited only by the height of the point of view. It stretched away measureless to the west, and was only stopped in an equally measureless career toward the southeast by a belt of timber showing purple-blue against the copper-gleaming sky. It was toward this belt of timber that the sleepy horseman was riding.

He was a large man, lean and brown, with long, sinewy arms and bony fingers that seemed as if made to grip and not let go. His bronzed face was devoid of beard, revealing a square jaw and firm-set mouth, while beneath his low hat were two gray eyes, by nature keen, but just now dull with drowsiness.

The drowsy eyes managed now and again to scan the horizon for a moment in a mechanical sort of way. In one of these sleepy surveys the half-shut eyes detected a small speck, not stationary, but creeping languidly along at right angles to the direction of our slumberous rider. In a flash the sleepy eyes awoke and fixed themselves piercingly upon that speck. The overhanging eye-

brows came sharply together, the horse was pulled up, and for the space of half a minute the man's whole powers were concentrated in one steady gaze. The distant speck ceased creeping, and for a like space of half a minute also remained stationary. Two specks gazing intently at each other across three miles of prairie and unable to make each other out. They moved on again. Our horseman, no longer sleepy, slung forward his rifle and looked at the cap. He even changed it for a fresh one from a tin box in his belt. He unstrapped his holster and looked carefully at his pistol, and seemed almost to shake himself into a state of loose activity. One became conscious that his sinews and muscles had received orders to be at attention, ready for any demand that might be made upon them. A precisely similar course of overhauling and general preparation was presumably in progress on the person of the other speck, which now began more visibly to take on the form of a man on horseback.

“Making for the crossing,” remarked our rider to himself. “Guess I ain’t going to let him get to the creek before me.”

He gave his horse a touch of the spur, whereupon the horse woke up and answered. Horses usually do answer such a spur, for it was the sort called “Mexican,” with rowels an inch long and smartly sharpened at the point. The rival horseman, if such he was, did not respond to the challenge of a race for the crossing, so that the big man on the brown horse had ample time to cross the water course. There was no river to cross, for the year of 1860 had been the driest known in the short-lived history of Kansas. The rivers were all gone out of the land, and rough and stony tracks alone remained as a memento of their former presence, with here and there a pool, clear and deep, or shallow and slimy, according as it was fed by springs or was the

leavings of the dried-up river. Our rider stumbled briskly over the stony river bed and then sat in a loosely expectant attitude on his horse, facing the creek. A casual observer might not have realized that he had assumed a position which commanded a full view of the track through the woods coming to the crossing, while a broken stump overhung by grapevines almost entirely shielded his horse and formed no inefficient protection to his own person. It was in order to get behind this very stump that he had ridden so hard. He had some little time to wait, for the other rider was in no hurry. He came on at a leisurely pace through the woods, and even beguiled the time by whistling to himself in a lively manner.

“That coon Heaton!” said the big man as soon as the whistling fell on his ear, and forthwith he came out from behind the stump and rode down to a pool near the crossing, where his horse amused himself by alternately dipping his nose into the water and then blowing loudly at it. “Hullo, Mills!” observed the whistler in friendly salutation, breaking off abruptly in the middle of the alluring melody of *Billy Boy*.

Mills made no reply, but watched the other man crossing the stony bottom, and then ranged up alongside of him and said in an interrogative manner.

“Going?”

“Yes,” replied Heaton; “I suppose you’re going, too.”

“Pretty near every one’s in this ride, I reckon,” said the first speaker, and they lapsed into silence, riding side by side out of the bottom lands up on to the high prairie once more. Mills looked sharply at his companion’s rifle, and then, after a length of time he remarked: “Hain’t had it long, I reckon.”

“What? Oh, I see. It’s my new rifle—Sharpe’s carbine. It’s only just come down from Kansas City,

and I thought I might as well bring it along, though of course we sha'n't want to use our weapons." Heaton's answer was really more in reply to his companion's inquiring glances than to his spoken words, which were very few indeed.

"Ever shoot a man?" inquired Mills.

"Lord, no!" answered Heaton in surprise at the question; and it was on the tip of his tongue to add that he had always lived in a civilized land, but he reflected in time that this remark might hurt the feelings of a Kansas man, so he refrained, and they rode on again in silence.

"Tain't no sort like shooting buffaloes and deer," observed Mills, who seemed oblivious of both time and space in his conversation. "No, sir; I can tell you if it ain't. I've seen men as steady as the everlasting rock at buffaloes, and they couldn't hit a man at six yards. You see buffaloes hain't got rifles, and they don't shoot, and men mostly does, and that makes a big difference."

"I dare say it is the sort of thing to flurry your nerves," remarked Heaton in considerable amusement at his companion's course of reasoning.

"And the nearer the man is the harder he is to hit. That's my experience," continued Mills, in a meditative manner. "Guess it's because t'other feller's gun looks so all-fired big when he's close up you can't hit him nohow you fix yourself."

He indulged in a silent laugh which seemed to afford him much inward satisfaction, but the only outward sign of merriment was a heaving of his big chest. Heaton, on the other hand, gave a big guffaw of amusement, which showed that he was not an old hand out there. In fact, Heaton was a recent arrival from Vermont, a bright intelligent young man, a dare-devil, maybe, but not at all up to the cautious craft of the

older settlers. He would, as we have seen, go whistling through the woods, although he knew there was a strange man in front of him. Mills got behind a stump and waited in a strong position to see who the other man might be. It was the difference between five years' experience of Kansas and no experience of it.

"Last time I was over the border," resumed Mills, after another profound silence, "we were tracked by twenty Missouri men. They caught up with us just before we got to the border. There were thirty of us, but we had a considerable lot of truck and five or six wagons. We were blazing away as close as could be. Men and horses and guns don't get much nigher one another than we were. There wasn't anybody shot. What beats me is where in thunder the bullets go to. Might as well have been shooting peas for all the harm we did, or good either."

"Well, there won't be any shooting this time," observed Heaton.

"Don't be too sure of that. You can't never say for certain what there won't be in a Jay-Hawk ride. Old John Brown, he didn't like shooting. One time he was dreadful set against any shooting. Guess even he'd find it hard sometimes to get along now without it," remarked Mills.

"You were one of his men, I believe," said Heaton.

"You may bet on that. I've been out with old John Brown a good many times. He was the best leader I ever saw. Brown and Montgomery were the two best."

"And you saw some pretty tall doings out here," observed Heaton, by way of encouraging his taciturn companion to talk.

"Tall doings and low doings," said Mills emphatically, "and doings of all sorts."

"You've been in most things, I guess," said the younger man.

"I was pretty generally round somewhere close. I was in Lawrence when it was burned, and I was at Ossawatomie."

"And still you think a man with a gun in his hand is hard to shoot at ten paces," said Heaton with a laugh.

"Yaas," replied Mills with a grin; "mighty hard to shoot till you get used to the uncommon size his rifle looks."

"You've a pretty correct eye for the size, haven't you?" remarked Heaton, looking at his tough companion in some awe.

Mills nodded. They rode along in silence for some miles, and at length came to a small log cabin standing just below the bluff over Big Sugar Creek. This cabin was usually a deserted-looking place, with no signs of children or chickens or the cheerful clatter of a settler's dwelling around it, but on the afternoon of which I write it was a scene of activity and excitement. Some twenty horses were hitched to various parts of the dilapidated stake fence that surrounded the house, and four wagons with their big canvas covers stood near by. Men in riding boots, red shirts, and large hats were moving about everywhere, and the place presented an appearance of expectancy punctuated with rifles. A rendezvous clearly, and one that had been numerously attended.

The arrival of our two horsemen was greeted with satisfaction, or it would be more correct to say that Mills's arrival was so greeted. Heaton's coming seemed to create no emotion whatsoever. A little black-bearded man, who was somewhat remarkable among the others, all of whom were clean shaven, at once hailed our friend Mills.

"I was waiting for you," said the little man in quick, sharp accents. "You are wanted to lead one of the bands. We shall divide into two companies and stampede as many negroes as we can, and get out again before the alarm is given. Sharp is the word. Those Missouri men are mad now."

"You bet!" remarked Mills.

"We'll march at daybreak, and be over the border by two hours after sunup. You are to go south by Hillsborough; I am going north. Gather up your niggers as spry as you can. Wagons to be filled only with women and children. We meet at the Mine Creek crossing. No shooting if you can possibly help it. Those are your orders."

"All right, captain," said Mills, and the two men separated without a word of further conversation, although old companions in arms. They had serious work in hand, and wasted no time in idle words.

"I am going by Hillsborough; you can come with me, if you like," said Mills later on in the evening to Heaton. "There won't be no use for your new rifle in my party, if I can help it."

"I shouldn't join if there was," replied Heaton with a smile. "This shooting in the cause of freedom isn't to my taste, and there's no need for it either, I'm sure."

"Wal, I dunno," replied Mills in a noncommittal tone.

The men were busy feeding their horses, and as each one had at least one horse, there was very little time for idle talk. To Heaton, unused as he was to the silent manners of prairie men when out on business, it seemed almost as if they were regarding each other with suspicion. Instead of a free and hearty interchange of semijocular remarks, which is what the young man expected under the circumstances, these men spoke but seldom, and then very much to the point.

"Takin' heap o' bullets an' powder?" said one gray-haired man to another about his own age.

"Pretty tole'ble. An' you?"

"Right smart chance o' bullets in this hyar belt o' mine," said the first speaker, tapping his ammunition pouch. "I run out once in Missouri. Man feels powerful queer and skeery when he knows he's got his last bullet down his bar'l."

The speaker strolled off to his horse, and Heaton, with the chattiness of his youth and nature, picked up the thread of conversation.

"Do you expect to meet with resistance so that the rifles will have to be used?" he asked, more by way of opening the conversation with him who had boasted of his bullets than because he put much faith in what had been said.

"Dunno. Missouri men is spry 'nough with their shooting irons, gin'rally speakin'."

"But orders are to have no shooting," replied Heaton, not liking this free preparation for a battle.

"Yaas, but them orders is on'y for this hyar ride, an' the gin'ral order's 'gin them," said the man, slowly buckling up his pouch.

"What is the general order?"

"Allers to shoot fust."

Heaton laughed. "Oh, I suppose that is the law of Nature," he repeated lightly.

"Reckon I'll feed my critter," said his companion, moving off to where his horse stood tied to the fence. Heaton followed his example, and, having fed his horse, lay down in a corner of the fence to sleep as well as he could until the dawn should send them on their way. But he found it difficult enough to compose his mind to rest. A thousand thoughts rushed through his brain. Recollections of home mixed up with flashing visions of what might be before him in the near future.

His life had hitherto rolled along in the beaten track of civilization, but now for the first time there was a possibility of his being in conflict with his fellow-men. He might have to fight for his life before another night came on. He might kill a man or be himself killed. The consequences of either alternative were tremendous. True "no shooting" was the order of the march, but that was an order qualified by that supreme principle which governed every man's action, of "shooting first." Heaton couldn't help wondering, as he put his rifle into its case in order to keep it from the night dews, whether he should feel so alarmed at the size of the "other feller's" gun as to be unable to pull his trigger. But of course these were idle fancies. There would be no shooting. Certainly, as far as he was concerned there would be none. He fell asleep at length with thoughts such as these in his mind, and for some subsequent hours was engaged in a fruitless, but no less frantic endeavour to bring his rifle to his shoulder in order to shoot some man who was already sighting him behind a most alarmingly capacious barrel. He never succeeded in finishing the dream, but awoke again and again to find his heart thumping loudly against his side and beads of perspiration standing thick on his forehead. The horror of the sleep and its dreams was so great that he got up two hours before the dawn and went for a tramp through the soaking grass.

"I'm a pretty coward!" said Heaton to himself with a pang of shame. "The mere prospect of riding on a foray into Missouri has made me shiver with fright, as if I were a girl in a dark room where an owl screeched at her. Bah! What things are nerves!"

CHAPTER II

NANCY OVERTON

A PRETTY girl standing in the sunlight, and a young man looking wistfully at her—what could be more appropriate on a bright afternoon? She knew that he was gazing at her, although she was not looking directly at him. Her eyes were cast down, but she felt his gaze, nevertheless. His glance pierced her sunbonnet and dyed her round cheeks rosy red. She was not, however, of the meek order of humanity; so, red cheeks or not, she raised her eyes defiantly, and said:

“No, I won’t.”

“Why?” he asked, with a foolish manlike desire to be furnished with a reason.

“Because I won’t; that’s why,” answered she with a truly womanlike determination to withhold her reason.

“All the girls are going,” said he.

“Then no one will miss me,” said she.

“Nancy! You know you are the only girl I shall care to see,” said he vehemently.

“Then why did you mention the other girls?” asked she with a flash of her white teeth.

“Because I thought it might make you want to go, too,” said he.

“Well, it doesn’t.”

“Then I sha’n’t go either.”

“The other girls will be disappointed.”

“Damn the other girls!” said he furiously.

“ Oh, you bad man, how dare you say such a thing! ”

“ You’d drive a man clean crazy,” he said, jerking his bridle over his horse’s neck. “ I suppose that’s what girls are made for: to torment a man like the mischief.”

“ Women are made in order to train men,” she observed loftily.

“ Thank you for my training lesson.”

He sprang upon his horse, dug his spur into the animal’s side, and dashed down the road in a passion of anger. The girl stood quite still, looking intently after him as long as his horse’s thundering stride could be heard on the road; and then with a sigh she turned from the bars.

“ I should like to have gone to the corn bee,” she remarked aloud. “ I do wish he hadn’t been the one to ask me. Men are as horrid as they can be! ”

She stamped her foot angrily, and in her black eyes there came a wicked flash. No, indeed, Nancy Overton was not of the meek order of womankind. Her black eyes, her full red lips, her rosy-red cheeks—all betokened good generous blood in her veins. She was strong, healthy, young, and pretty enough to be as impudent and as defiant as ever she liked to all the young men of the neighbourhood. It did not matter in the least what she did or what she said. They one and all fell madly in love with her just the same, and came day after day to sigh at her feet and to be driven away by her petulance, just as James Harte had been on this sunny afternoon of which I am writing.

Nancy walked back to the house, a quaint rambling structure with a long veranda, commonly called “ de po’ch ” on one side, and a tall, friendly-looking chimney rising from the end. The house had begun life some twenty years before by being a log cabin, but now it had grown into quite a substantial dwelling, all of

wood, of course, but none the less comfortably clad in garments of blossoming nasturtiums, roses, and fruit-decked vines. The deep, shady porch with its trails of climbing plants invited one to come in and rest from the glare of the sunlight. Two doors opened off it, each leading into a capacious room. In one of these rooms at the present moment sat a man to whom Nancy bore that softened and refined likeness which unmistakably proclaimed that they were father and daughter. Overton was a bad-tempered man to all the world except Nancy. No one but Nancy ever dared to say "No" to him, and she only occasionally, when her woman's instinct told her she might do so with impunity. He sat beside a plain oak table, resting one hand heavily upon it, while with the other he flicked at his boot with a short cowhide whip. He looked up as his daughter entered, and she saw the black thundercloud on his brow. Even the dauntless Nancy quailed before that thundercloud.

"Those free-state men are gathering for another raid, folks was saying up at Papinsville," said Overton, with a strong Missouri accent, but without making use of the oaths that usually garnished a Missouri man's talk. He never swore nor allowed others to swear in Nancy's presence, and the restraint he had exercised upon himself had finally resulted in clearing his language of oaths. Nancy's heart stood still with terror. A free-state raid was the ever-present dread of her life.

"Has Jim Harte been here lately?" asked Overton.

"Yes, father; he came to-day to ask me to the corn bee over at the Westertons. It is going to be the biggest bee that ever was here in this part. Everybody is going."

"You can do as you like about going, Nancy, though those Westertons ain't regular downright Mis-

souri folks, and I don't like their notions. But I want you to remember that if Jim Harte gives warning to those Free-soil scoundrels about my slaves I'll shoot him at sight. Yes, if it was in the meetinghouse itself."

Nancy turned a trifle pale.

"You'd better warn him. Or if that other fellow, Gleeson—he's another of those confounded Free-soilers—if he lets on the least wink and we lose our property, he won't wink many more mornings, for I'll shoot him through the chinks of his cabin. There are plenty of holes in it. I could do it as easy as not."

"Father," faltered Nancy, pale to the very lips, "you wouldn't murder a fellow-creature."

"Tain't murder. It's defending my rights and looking after my property. Those slaves are mine. I'll not sit by and see them stolen by a lot of rascally Kansas ruffians that only live by running off negroes."

"I wish we hadn't any slaves, if it's going to lead to strife and bloodshed," said Nancy beneath her breath.

"What!" exclaimed Overton angrily; "are you coming abolitionist bosh over me? Is that some of the stuff you've learned from Jim Harte?"

"Jim Harte never said much about it," returned Nancy, the colour gradually coming back into her plump cheeks.

"If I thought he was going to teach you such nonsense he'd have to clear out of this and make tracks, I can tell you," said Overton, looking sternly at her.

"I don't think Jim Harte teaches me much. I am teaching him," said Nancy, with a dimpling laugh. "At least he said so this evening."

Overton's brow cleared, and he almost smiled back to Nancy.

"Well, well, I reckon you can see to that 'most as

well as any girl this side the Mississippi. But don't let me hear you talking that way again," said her father.

"Who said there was going to be a raid?"

"A man who came over the line early this morning. He said a man asked him was he going to join the ride from Bain's cabin. He shut up pretty quick when he found he was barking up the wrong tree. Only something is fixing at Bain's cabin, and that's where that old ruffian John Brown used to start his runs from. Sooner than let them get hold of my slaves I'd sell every one of them South for fifty dollars apiece."

"O daddy, daddy, you won't sell Aunt Monin! You mustn't sell Aunt Monin!" burst out Nancy with a perfect wail of grief. It was so unexpected that her father was nonplussed for a moment and remained silent.

"I'll have to sell every one if those Jay-Hawkers come hereabouts," he said somewhat apologetically.

"But Aunt Monin—promise, daddy, not Aunt Monin," persisted Nancy.

"I guess Aunt Monin wouldn't be much comfort to you if she was run off by free-state men into Kansas, where you'd never set an eye on her again," observed her father argumentatively.

"She wouldn't ever go over the border away from me; I know she wouldn't. She won't ever leave me."

"They wouldn't ask her leave, but would run her off all the same."

"No, they wouldn't do that," objected Nancy.

"How do you know the Jay-Hawkers wouldn't compel her to go, or any one else they came across in their raids?"

"They only want to set the slaves free," said Nancy unguardedly.

"Who told you that?" asked her father quickly. Nancy, perceiving her mistake, remained silent.

“Who told you, I say? Some dog of an abolitionist has been trying to get at you. It’s that scoundrel Jim Harte!” said Overton, rising, while his brow darkened angrily.

“It wasn’t Jim Harte,” said Nancy.

“Then it was that other fellow, Gleeson; I always thought he was a spy.”

“Father, he’s not a spy!” cried Nancy in a fright, knowing only too well what would be the fate of a spy in that land at that time. “It is a wicked thing for you to say, and if any harm comes to him through your saying he is one you will be accountable for it.”

Nancy was roused to show more feeling than was habitual with her.

Her father looked keenly at her white face and flashing eye, and, drawing perchance a wrong conclusion, said:

“Oh, if it’s him you’re hankering for you’d better look after him, and he’d better look after himself if he’s going to play traitor in this county. The boys mostly do what you tell them to, Nancy; but it ’ull take more than your black eyes to stop ’em if once they get on the trail of a regular downright traitor.”

Overton walked toward the door, and, turning, spoke a last word:

“Yankees ain’t got no business here in Missouri, anyhow, and the sooner they’re all cleared out the better for us—and for them, too.”

He left the room, walking with quick angry strides down the porch and on thence toward the fields. Nancy, left to her own thoughts, seemed to find the room too small for her, agitated as she was. Accordingly, after walking rapidly up and down several times, she, too, left it and hurried off, but not toward the fields. The young girl ran round the house, across the yard, where many chickens, turkeys, and Guinea fowl

were holding afternoon cackle, and entered a small log cabin some twenty yards away. This log cabin was the kitchen of the place, built isolated and far from the dwelling house, a precaution against heat, brought from southern Virginia by the owners of the place, who hailed from that State. The kitchen would have been utterly dark save for the light that came in through a door which was large and always open, both summer and winter. A huge fireplace occupied the entire end of the room, where three or four mighty logs smouldered away in a soft bed of white ash. Immense black hooks hung from the black cavern of the chimney, and a number of black pots, skillets, and baking ovens stood in a solemn row against the wall. On the opposite side, in another row, squatted several little negroes, as black and solemn and motionless as the pots. Their beady eyes rolled in their heads as they watched the presiding priestess of this temple moving about with a rolling-pin in her hand. They would have loved to run hither and thither, and to peer into the tempting black pots, but were restrained by a wholesome awe of the priestess and a vivid recollection of the weight of that rolling-pin when she cracked it upon their woolly skulls.

“Yo’, Pete, yo’ pison lazy nigga, jess scoot down de fiel’ an’ fetch me han’ful ingyons [onions],” said the woman with the rolling-pin.

Pete reached the upright position via a Catherine wheel of remarkable velocity, and stood grinning from ear to ear, his red lips shining like two scarlet lines of sealing wax along his white flashing teeth.

“Pike now, yo’ nigga,” said the woman, with a suggestive twirl of the rolling-pin over her head. Pete uttered a war whoop and was out through the door before the twirl was half completed. All the other little niggers rolled their eyes to such an angle of excitement and interest that the whites alone were visible, they

licked their lips and showed their teeth like a row of manikins set in motion by machinery, but they never stirred from sitting on their small black feet, so perfect was the discipline maintained by the rolling-pin.

Pete instantly reappeared inside the doorway, the blackest imaginable silhouette against the bright sky, and announced with exultation:

“Young Miss Nancy, she done comin’ clar down de ya’d to de kitching, she done.”

“Yo’ clar out an’ git dem ingleons right smart, or I’ll stamp yo’ two eyes inter one,” said the woman in a clear musical voice, very much at variance with the purport of her words. Thus adjured, Pete departed after his onions, and in another moment Nancy stood in the doorway.

“My honey-chile, dat yo’ sweet se’f comin’ ter see ole Aunt Monin?” said the negress, turning with eagerness to greet her visitor.

Aunt Monin was a tall, large woman, with grizzled woolly hair, a black, shiny face, and the keenest eyes that ever kept track of the simultaneous impishness of six little niggers, all trying to steal her honey cakes as fast as she took them out of the oven. She wore a red turban twisted around her head, which made her look even taller than she was, a clean white shirt, and a blue cotton petticoat. Summer or winter, early or late, in snow and in sunshine, Aunt Monin was always just like that. She never looked either hot or cold, but was always alert, clean, shiny, and as black as black could be. Aunt Monin was the cook and also the devoted servant of Miss Nancy, upon whom she lavished that wealth of love and love language that had accumulated in large measure in her breast; perhaps because she had no offspring of her own on whom to lavish it. For Miss Nancy were reserved such expressions as “honey-chile,” “de summa rose,” and many another, while for the

little niggers, who were of her own colour, and who might have been supposed to lie near her heart, there was the rolling-pin.

“ Yo’ niggas, clar out o’ dat,” said Aunt Monin, waving her long black arm around the cabin and pointing to the door. In one instant the squatting young ones had tumbled pellmell out of the door and were careering after the chickens and turkeys, to the infinite clatter of all concerned.

“ Miss Nancy, heart’s delight, yo’ jess come an’ set yo’ little pearl teeth in dish hyar honey cake,” said Aunt Monin in a cooing voice, as if she was talking to a baby.

“ No. I can’t eat; it would choke me,” said Nancy, with a sob.

“ Lordy, Miss Nancy, chile, what’s wrong wid de lamb?” exclaimed Aunt Monin in an extremity of distress.

“ Father says there’s going to be a raid out of Kansas.”

Aunt Monin’s eyes gave a great flash of light, as if a sudden joy had burst forth from their dusky depths.

“ And he says they’ll come this way, maybe,” continued Nancy, idly poking a stick into the ashes and sending a thousand sparks flying up the chimney. Aunt Monin’s eyes rivalled the sparks for brightness.

“ De Lo’d has hearn de voice o’ de ‘pressed an’ de helpless,” said she in deep and solemn tones.

“ But, Aunt Monin, you don’t want to go and leave me? You won’t, will you?” said Nancy, rousing herself from poking the ashes, and looking up at the old woman in sudden surprise at this unexpected outburst.

“ Honey-chile!” said the negress in a caressing voice.

“ I couldn’t bear to lose you, Aunt Monin. Everything is changing. It isn’t one bit as it used to be long

ago when we were all so happy," said Nancy plaintively. "I don't see why people couldn't have stayed as they were."

"Dere's gwine ter be changes, an' de lan' will be made a wil'erness, an' de howl o' de wolf will be hearn," said Aunt Monin, who was a great person for holding forth to people of her own colour. Among them she enjoyed the reputation of being a sort of prophetess, a reputation perhaps largely founded upon her power of saying things whereof the meaning was not too clearly obvious.

CHAPTER III

THE FATAL SHOT

FIVE horsemen were stealthily approaching Overton's house, keeping a sharp lookout as they rode, one in front, one behind, and three abreast in the middle.

"Now this job has got to be done in less than no time, if we are to catch up with the rest of them before they get to the creek," said Mills, who was in command. He rode in the centre, having Heaton on his right and his son, a lad of seventeen, on his left. His keen eyes seemed to take in everything, and yet he had no appearance of being in a fluster; on the contrary, he was calm and matter of fact to a degree which Heaton found hard to imitate, conscious as he was of a distinct quickening of his own pulse now that the time for action drew near.

"It 'ull be spryer if we divide, won't it, dad?" said young Mills, who had been preternaturally silent during the ride, but upon whose obtuse mind the approaching crisis seemed to have a vivifying effect.

"That's so," said his father, vastly gratified at this exhibition of cuteness on the part of his offspring; and then turning to Heaton, he continued. "There ain't goin' to be no fuss here, 'cause there ain't nobody to make it. There's only a gal in the house. Guess you'll go an' talk to her a spell while we get them niggers together. You'll kinder be agreeable an' keep her from runnin' off to give the alarm. Guess you can do that

sort o' thing real well, an' you'd be a long sight cuter at it than Tom would."

He grinned at his son and winked at Heaton, who did not feel at all gratified at the task allotted to him. To try to talk agreeably to a young girl and to engage her attention while his companions were running off her slaves was not heroic. He would much prefer not to see the girl at all, and so he told Mills.

"Afraid of her screeching? Land sakes, man, if you're as squeamish as all that what in thunder did you come on this ride for? But you needn't be scared 'bout that. She won't screech, 'cause we hain't goin' after the furniture of the house. Women folks don't ever holler till you begin to bang 'bout the chairs and beds an' things in the house. They mos'ly don't mind the slaves bein' run off. It's the men gets mad then."

"I hearn tell there's ole man in the house," observed Tom Mills, stimulated by the paternal praise to make as good a show as he could of his new powers of usefulness and suggestiveness.

"Wal, wal, if there be, 'tain't no great shakes. You can speak to him kinder positive," said Mills, addressing Heaton. "Guess I'd better go round straight to the nigger quarters an' see an' git them all started quick. Nigger babies is mighty slow to pack, anyhow. Ole man Weaver'll go roun' by the field an' get in the han's. They're boun' to be all out thar to-day."

Heaton listened to this plan of campaign in considerable disgust. His part seemed not at all attractive. This is frequently the feeling of actors when their rôles are being allotted. He intimated to Mills that he would far rather go to the fields and gather up the negroes.

"No, no; you're too soft to handle niggers," replied that very outspoken individual. "You just git 'long an' keep the gal quiet. You'll do it fust-rate."

Heaton felt angry as well as humiliated.

“ And the old man? ”

“ Keep him quiet, too; can’t you? ” replied Mills curtly.

This completed the young man’s discomfiture, for he could not help seeing that he was looked upon as a sort of no-account, who was told off to do the silly work that no one else would undertake. He even began to feel vexed at that girl who was the unconscious cause of his humiliation, and resolved to make no attempt whatsoever to entertain her, but simply to order her to be quiet. There is nothing that galls a young man so much as to be thought wanting in resource or energy when in the presence of hardy frontier men such as these that Heaton was riding with on this his first Jay-Hawk raid.

Mills rode into the negro quarters—a collection of log cabins at some distance from the dwelling house. His advent was greeted by a chorus of shouts, barks, and cackles, according as boys, dogs, and chickens became aware of his presence.

“ Friends, ” began Mills; but no sooner was the well-recognised formula heard than a shout arose of “ Free-soil men! Free-soil men! ” intermingled with howls of “ The Jay-Hawkers! the Jay-Hawkers! ” None but these ever addressed negroes as “ friends. ” From every cabin came the slaves, all women and children, flocking around Mills, the little ones almost rolling beneath his horse’s feet.

“ Oh, mas’r, mas’r, de Lo’d has hearn our voice. De Lo’d be praised! We’s gwine ter be free! Oh, Lordy, Lordy! Oh, Mas’r Jay-Hawker, take me, an’ me, an’ me! Oh, mas’r, take us all! ”

These and many other passionate, incoherent shouts and exclamations greeted Mills’s ear as he sat on his horse looking down at the eager black faces beneath him. A huge negro, over six feet high and of herculean build rushed around the corner of the huts, his

mouth open and his great eyes almost starting out of his head.

“We’s gwine ter be free!” he yelled with panting gasps. “Susanner we’s gwine ter be free! Why don’t yer shout Glory, halleluiah! now? Dish am better dan de comin’ of de Lo’d yer allers prayin’ ‘bout. We’s free niggas now.” These remarks he addressed to his wife, a meek-looking mulatto woman with sad black eyes heavy with unshed tears. She stood silent among the shouting throng, holding her little black baby in her arms. The big negro seized the little black baby and held it aloft in one mighty hand, while with the other, clinched as if for fighting, he struck out toward the sun.

“Yo’ll nebber shine on me no mo’ a slave,” he said fiercely; “no, an’ yo’ won’t shine on dish hyar nigga boy a slave.”

He shook his fist in the face of Heaven.

“De Lord’s will be done!” said the meek-eyed wife.

“We’s free niggas, whedder or no,” replied her husband as he laid the baby again in her arms.

Cæsar was Overton’s biggest and strongest slave, and would have been his most valuable one except for a certain fierceness of temper that nothing could tame. In the hope of making him less savage his master had insisted upon his marrying Susannah, a gentle mulatto woman much given to praying, and for a time Cæsar had appeared to be content. But when his boy was born the wild, untamed savage spirit within him awoke once more. He was forever brooding over his condition and cursing God for the brand of slavery which was set upon his child’s brow. His prayerful wife used to be speechless with terror at his wild ravings sometimes. And though Overton had no idea of the depth of his feelings, he had not failed to perceive that Cæsar was a dangerous negro, who would lead a revolt or head

a stampede with courage and ferocity. Accordingly, his doom was sealed. He was to be sold South, to work away his life in the cotton swamps of Louisiana. The sale had actually taken place, and Cæsar, although he knew nothing of it, was at this very moment the property of a New Orleans dealer, and was only left with his old master until the dealer had his troop of slaves ready to start down the river. Then, Overton flattered himself, he would be forever rid of Cæsar and his rebellious influence. In this transaction Susannah had, of course, not been considered. She was to remain where she was and be given to some other man. Slavery did not sanction indissoluble marriage.

The arrival of Cæsar, although it has taken some time to explain, was in reality the affair of a couple of seconds only, and his deep shouts had scarcely added a bass to the noise of the shrill screamings of the women and children when suddenly all the clamour ceased.

A sharp, quick sound silenced them all, even the dogs.

A rifle shot rang on the still air.

“The sentinels, by gosh!” exclaimed Mills, starting in his saddle and jerking his pistol out of its holster. “Back to your quarters!” he called, and the negroes melted out of sight.

A long, wailing scream in a girlish voice came from the direction of the house.

“That fool Heaton has shot the gal,” said Mills between his teeth. “The damned Yankee sinner!”

He put spurs to his horse and dashed up to the house.

When Heaton, in pursuance of his orders, had separated from the rest of the party, he rode quietly to the house, dismounted, tied his horse to the bars, and abruptly entered the room just opposite him. The sudden change from the dazzling light of the open air to

the semidarkness of a well-shaded room at first bewildered him. He did not clearly perceive either the contents of the room or its occupants. All he could make out was the vague figure of some one lolling back in a rocking-chair. Heaton concluded this to be the old man of his companions' report.

Accordingly, he walked straight up to him and said:

"I'm a Jay-Hawker. We've come in a band to free your slaves. Resistance is useless; we have surrounded the house."

Overton, who had in reality been half asleep, opened his eyes without the slightest appearance of alarm. Heaton, now more accustomed to the darkness of the room, began to notice that so far from being an old man he was a man in the prime of life, and a singularly determined-looking one to boot. He began to wish that he had not come alone on the mission of keeping the folks in the house quiet. Still, as the most dangerous thing he could do would be to show any hesitation in his manner, he stood his ground steadily enough, holding his rifle in his left hand, with his right hand resting on the stock. Overton gave him a steady glare of defiance, and without taking his eyes off the young man said, pointing to a corner of the room, "Get it."

He had observed that Heaton was a very young fellow. He noted that his revolver was still tightly strapped up in his holster, instead of being unfastened, ready for instant use, as it should have been. Overton knew the regular Jay-Hawker well, and he came rapidly to the conclusion that he had to deal with a greenhorn whom it would be quite possible to overcome, notwithstanding the surprise of the visit. Heaton heard the words, but could not imagine what they meant or to whom they were addressed, not being aware of the presence of any one in the room except the man who was glaring at him with such unflinching firmness. A mo-

ment of breathless silence. Heaton heard a rustling sound, but dared not take his eyes off the man before him, who had risen to his feet and showed that he was both tall and powerfully built.

Heaton now brought his rifle to full cock, grasping the barrel with his left hand and putting his finger on the trigger. He would have nothing to do but to aim and pull if it should come to the worst.

The rustling sound came nearer, and into his field of vision there protruded a rifle barrel. It flashed across him now what the order had meant and what the rustling was.

A woman was handing a gun to the man.

“If you touch that gun I’ll shoot you!” he exclaimed in a high-pitched, agitated voice.

It was all the work of a second, but Heaton always retained the impression that it was a slow proceeding—a most horribly slow proceeding, lengthening out into a hideously protracted span of minutes, hours, almost. The man reached out his hands for the gun, taking it with seeming awkwardness, muzzle foremost, from a woman who now appeared from somewhere, suddenly, as if she had started up from the floor. The man, with the muzzle of his gun in his hand, was rapidly getting it into position. The time had clearly come for obeying that supreme general order of “shooting first.” Heaton wondered stupidly, or thought he wondered, how he had so quickly reached that order after entering the room. He couldn’t understand it. But instinctively he understood that rifle barrel that was going to point toward him. The man was turning it. Was he quick at getting his weapon into position? He (Heaton), he had heard men say, was very quick at bringing his gun up to the shoulder and taking aim. Now was the moment for quickness. How leaden-weighted his barrel seemed! Would this amazing weight make his hand tremble?

Was he sighting too high or not high enough? Good God! He could see nothing; neither the sights, nor the man, nor anything. This, then, was the blindness of shooting which came upon men and prevented them from hitting an enemy even at ten feet. This was what Mills and the others had referred to.

A loud report rang through the room.

A shot had been fired. Had he fired it? Heaton did not feel certain. Yet he must have done so, for he had received the kick of his gun in the shoulder. In all his hunting experience he had never before fired without knowing he had done so, and knowing when he had pulled the trigger.

The other man stood opposite him, but—ah, what was that? He was gradually sinking backward, and his gun was falling from his hand.

It fell with a crash. He raised a nerveless hand toward his breast. The hand fell back, and then he, too, fell back with a heavy thud.

Through the room rang the loud, piercing scream of a girlish voice. Heaton stood still in a daze, seeing nothing, all his faculties stunned by that scream that echoed and re-echoed through his brain. Had he not been in such a daze he would have seen that the girl was picking up the gun from the floor, where it had fallen beside the man, and was feverishly endeavouring to pull up the cock with her trembling fingers. He would have seen that after two failures she succeeded in getting it at full cock, and that she was raising it to her shoulder as she knelt upon the ground with one knee. He would have seen that she was aiming straight at him, only he was so bewildered by that scream in his ears that he saw nothing. The heavy barrel was pretty steady, and in another second the trigger would have been pulled, when the inner door burst open and a tall negress sprang into the room. With a bound she was beside

that kneeling girl with the rifle to her shoulder, and with one swift blow of her long arm had struck the barrel up.

“Vengeance is mine, say de Lo’d. Honey-chile, what yo’ go fo’ ter do?”

Heaton’s senses began to come back to him.

“You tarnation fool, what did you shoot him for?” somebody was saying to him, and people knelt down by that man on the floor. A girl began to sob and say, “Father, father!” in such a piteous voice.

“Plumb through the heart! Wal, you are a cool hand, anyhow. Not one mite flurried in your aim, and your first man too, I guess.”

It was Mills who was speaking, and his words filled Heaton with a fierce loathing. He stumbled out of the room so as to get away from him, and also from that wailing cry of a girl’s heart-broken grief. But he could not get away from it. It seemed to be following him, and to be continually ringing in his ears.

The place was alive with people. Negroes, awe-struck, running about, with here and there a Jay-Hawker giving orders. The sentinels had come in at the sound of the shot, not knowing what was to follow. “See that no one gets away to give the alarm,” said Mills in the midst of the excitement. “Here, Heaton, you go. Stay at the fork of the road and shoot any one trying to pass you. Don’t let one get by. You’re such a dead sure shot you can do it.”

“You bet he can, pap,” said Tom Mills with a grin of admiring approval. Heaton had risen enormously in his estimation, and he was desirous of expressing his feelings. Accordingly, he stood by him as he unhitched his horse, and observed:

“Bully shot that, an’ in a dark room, too!”

Heaton looked at him in dumb horror, and, mounting his horse, rode away. He rode fast to get away from

that wailing voice, but it followed him. It seemed to be among the trees and to come down to him from the sky. He reached the fork of the road in a daze and looked up and down mechanically. What was he here for? Oh, yes, he remembered. To shoot people. Was this to be his fate for evermore—to shoot people sitting in their own houses or walking along peaceful shady roads through the wailing woods. He put his hand up for his rifle, and discovered he had none. Ah, yes, he must have left it in that dreadful room where the man lay so still on the floor and the girl was weeping over his body and calling him, "Father, father!"

He took his revolver out of its holster and sat motionless on his horse, waiting for somebody to come by that he must kill. Surely this was hell, and his punishment was that he must go on killing, though his heart froze with horror and his brain was dazed with the wailing sound of a young girl's weeping.

CHAPTER IV

THE DELUGE

WHILE Heaton in remorse and misery was guarding the fork of the road, the rest of the Jay-Hawkers were collecting the negroes as fast as they could for the return journey into Kansas. Mills ordered the women and children to be placed in Overton's two-horse wagon, a proceeding which excited undue hopes in the minds of some of the younger members of the community.

“Hooray, golly! Nigga woman ride in de ole mas'r's wagon!” yelled a stout fellow of sixteen, capering about on his sinewy legs. “Dish nigga ain't gwine ter wo'k no mo'. I'se gwine ter be free an' nebber wo'k no mo'!”

“Go 'long, you young scamp! Run and catch the pony down yonder in the pasture,” said Mills to him.

“Ain't gwine ter wo'k no mo'. I'se free nigga now,” replied the youth with vast dignity.

“Are you, by thunder? Take that!” said Mills, hitting him across the shoulders with a cowhide whip. The darky gave a duck to escape the blow and a howl to show his appreciation of it, and sped off to catch the pony as directed. “Yah, dat ole Jay-Hawker, he cut wid de lash jes' like ole mas'r done,” commented the lad to himself.

A black imp about ten years old came along with a battered hat full of fresh white eggs.

"Yo', Pete, whar yo' done git eggs?" screamed another equally black imp of about the same age.

"I done rob Miss Nancy's hen-roost," said Pete with a grin of delight. "I'se free nigg'a too. I steal ebbery day now."

The exasperated Mills felt called upon to deliver a sort of Declaration of Independence on behalf of these poor creatures who were clearly labouring under a delusion as to the nature and duties of a state of freedom.

"Look here, you all. Listen to me now. When you git 'cross Mine Creek you'll be in Kansas. You'll be free men an' women then."

"Glory, halleluiah! Golly Nddy, oh!" they cried in chorus.

"Shut up that noise, will you? You'll be free then, I tell yer. You'll have to work for all you have, and all you work for will be yours. You mustn't go an' steal from folks. If you do you'll git punished, so you will. If you steal horses you'll git hanged straight off, I can tell yer. These here horses an' this here wagon we're goin' to take 'long; they ain't bin stole. We're only takin' 'em in payment from your old master for the work you've been doin' for him while you were slaves. Now, do you understand?"

"Yes, mas'r, we un'erstan'!" they cried unanimously.

"Well, then, git 'long now. Women an' children in the wagon, an' the men on the horses. No stealin'. Remember, I'm boss now, an' I don't have no stealin' where I'm round. Now do you understand?"

"Yes, mas'r, we un'erstan'!" they cried again.

"Remember, no stealin'," repeated Mills in order to drive home his argument.

"We uns 'member, mas'r," said they with unction.

Not two minutes elapsed before Mills beheld a couple of urchins standing on the balustrade of the

veranda engaged in pulling down roses and grapevines by the armful.

“Quit that!” he roared. “What are you stealin’ those grapes for?”

“We ain’t stealin’, mas’r,” they replied with earnestness; “we’s on’y takin’ payment for de time we bin ole. mas’r’s slaves.”

“Clear out o’ this, you young scoundrel! Don’t you touch another thing, or by the Lord we’ll leave you behind. You’re only fit to be slaves, by gosh!” said Mills in a rage.

A young black woman came out of the house at this moment with two hats on her head and one in each hand.

“I’se on’y takin’ dish hyar in payment—” she began apologetically to Mills, who was sitting on his horse opposite the porch steps.

“Take those hats back, curse you! Don’t you lay a finger on anything else, or, by gum, I’ll flog you all round,” said the luckless man, trying to stem the tide, the flood gates of which he had so easily opened. Other leaders besides the Kansas Jay-Hawkers have found to their cost that in aiming at some high goal they had let loose forces which operated in totally different directions from those anticipated. Mills felt disgusted with the negroes, and also with himself, for having to flog into the most elementary honesty those very slaves to free whom he was risking his life. The negroes, on the other hand, considered him a very harsh master, and were in no little doubt whether it was worth being free under such circumstances. To many of them freedom had no charms if bereft of the power of stealing. Hitherto that had been their only form of retributive justice, and it was indeed a poor lookout if their first experience of the delights of liberty was to be a restriction of their natural propensities in this line. The opinions of

people who have never possessed any property, but are merely chattels themselves, are likely to run in quite other lines than those of the owners of property. Mills, who was not a philosopher to trouble himself with any problems, did not reason this out for himself, but was content to observe that "niggers is all-fired thieves, anyhow," and he determined to see they were located as far as practicable from his own home in Kansas when he got them there. His interest in negroes was very sincere, but he preferred that his duty should be the exciting one of running them off out of Missouri, rather than the tamer, albeit equally useful one, of teaching them the elements of individual rights, first among which is that of respect for other people's property.

The young woman with the hats retired to give back those trophies in a very discontented frame of mind.

"New mas'r powerful ugly temper," she remarked to herself. "Miss Nancy, she heap sight better nor he."

By this time the Jay-Hawkers had collected their negroes, the children were poking their black faces from under the canvas cover, looking for all the world like a load of inefficiently packed apes who might be relied upon to escape at the first opportunity. The men, with one exception, were either walking or were leading young horses and colts, which at a pinch they could ride. The one exception was that of an old negro nearly ninety years of age who sat on the seat in the women's wagon. All plantations used to have at least one very old man, whose duty it was to sit in the sun on summer days and talk to the passer-by. He was called "uncle" by every one, both white and black, and he usually was the repository of all the lore of the neighbourhood, besides having a good store of vague superstitions and traditional beliefs which came down to him from his African ancestors. Uncle Deedy was

the oracle of Overton's plantation. He it was who could tell by the sound of the tree frogs' croaking whether it was "gwine ter rain befo' de mo'nin'" or not. Uncle Deedy could almost forecast the course of the world's history by the way the wild geese flew; at all events, their proceedings on the outward journey were quite enough to settle the weather for the coming summer, while the return flight to the south was equally valuable as foretelling the weather for the ensuing winter.

Uncle Deedy, who for the last twenty years had passed an uneventful existence, picking up his chips and corncobs to light his little fire and smoking his stumpy pipe all day long, was immensely perturbed by all the noise and confusion of the raid. He didn't seem able to get hold of the right end of the subject at all, and kept asking was there going to be a prayer meeting, and what brother was going to preach? I have likened the small darkies to apes as they peeped out of the wagon; Uncle Deedy, with his grizzled half-bald head and his fringe of curly hair under the chin, was exceedingly like an ancient baboon.

Meantime the raiders were becoming very impatient. They called out several times to Mills to know if he was ready to start. He looked around so as to make quite sure that nobody was left behind, and there, on the top step of the veranda, standing in the full sunlight, with her red and yellow turban gleaming above her shining face, stood Aunt Monin.

"Hullo, my good soul, you're just in time to be saved. Jump into the wagon," said Mills cheerfully to her.

"I'se jess in time ter ax de blessin' o' de Lo'd for de chillun," she answered solemnly. "Bredern, yo' jess same like de chillun o' Israel gwine out inter de wilderness. De Lo'd go befo' yo' by day an' by night, an'

guide yo' to de lan' o' Canaan. Yo'se gwine ter de promise' lan'. Glory, halleluiah!"

"Come 'long, granny; hurry up," said Mills, impatient of the delay.

"No, mas'r," she said, bringing her big eyes slowly to bear upon him. "De spirit o' de Lo'd is 'pon me ter dwell in de lan' o' bon'age. I'se gwine ter stay wid my honey-chile. De han' o' de Lo'd is heavy 'pon her in 'fliction. I can't go for ter leave de lamb. I'se gwine ter stay wid her an' comfort de chile's heart."

"Come 'long, Aunt Monin," called out a woman from the wagon. "Come 'long inter de lan' o' promise."

"No, Susanner. I sha'n't nebber see de Ribber Jordan. I'se lef' behin' in de lan' o' trib'lation."

"Look here, Mills, are you goin' to wait here till a nigger camp meetin' has sprouted, or are you goin' to start home this side o' sundown?" called out one of the impatient raiders from the road.

"All right; go ahead," replied Mills, and then, turning to Aunt Monin, he made a last appeal. "Now, look here, friend. This here's goin' to be your last chance o' freedom. Will you come or not?"

"No, mas'r, I can't go. De blessin' o' freedom 'ud be dus' an' ashes in my mouth if my honey-chile warn't 'long wid me too. O mas'r, my heart's growed roun' dat chile like yo' nebber can know. Ole Aunt Monin's gwine ter live an' die for her honey-chile."

She turned as she said these words and slowly walked back into the house, while the women in the wagon set up a long drawn chant of Glory, halleluiah! They had meant it to be the song of triumph, but negroes always sing in a minor key, so that the sound which floated back on the still autumn air was that of women wailing together in sorrowful cadence. Fainter and fainter grew the sound as the wagons disappeared

down the leafy road, until at last there was perfect stillness at the farm—the stillness of death.

Nancy was left alone with her dead. She seemed overwhelmed with the blow that had fallen upon her. Aunt Monin in vain tried to rouse her. Hour after hour she sat in dumb misery, mourning over the father who had been slain by the ruthless Jay-Hawkers. How long she would have sat beside that sad couch watching her father's face set in its last stern lines of anger and defiance there is no knowing. She was aroused out of her stupor in spite of herself by one of those convulsions of Nature that sometimes visit the Western plains. The day had been bright, almost beyond the brightness of even an October day. The trees were glancing into yellows and reds earlier than usual, owing to the hot summer that had just passed. The sky was brilliant and clear, but in the northwest a small cloud "no bigger than a man's hand" rose about the middle of the afternoon. It spread and covered the heavens, and out of its lurid edges darted tongues of flame. A mighty wind heralded the storm, rushing through the woods with a roar, here and there tearing up those trees which had not taken deeply rooted precautions against wind. Behind the wind came the rain, and with the rain came the thunder and lightning, flash upon flash, peal upon peal. The house shook and the trees groaned. The rain came down in torrents that seemed to beat upon the shingle roof like pellets of iron. Never had there been such a storm known in western Missouri as the one which broke over it on the day when Overton was killed and his slaves were run off by the Jay-Hawkers. The storm in all its violence travelled from the west, and for years people used to talk about it, since it may be said to have closed the long and dismal chapter of the famous Kansas drought, which went so near to ruining the young country in the early days of its history. The

gates of heaven seemed unlocked and the floods rushed forth. The rain of twenty months fell in half that number of hours.

The storm caught the Jay-Hawkers as they were nearing the woods of Mine Creek. They tried to push on in spite of the fury of the gale, for they wanted to put the creek between themselves and any possible pursuers as soon as might be. But it was found impossible to proceed. The horses became absolutely unmanageable owing to the thunder and lightning, which were awful. Several of the young colts threw their riders and bolted. It was necessary to halt; camp it could not be called where no fires could be lighted nor grass pulled to make beds. The canvas cover of the wagon did not keep out the rain, and at any rate there was not room beneath its dripping roof for half the people who were collected under Mills's melancholy command. The children cried, the women wept and prayed by turns, and the rain poured unceasingly all night long. The negroes spent their first hours of freedom in the midst of misery, terror, cold, and wet. The strains of Glory, halleluiah! had quite ceased, and in their place came frantic prayers to be saved from a second deluge. They thought of the warm cabins at ole mas'r's plantation, and of how they had always there found shelter from the wildest storm, and many a regret was uttered for having left them. Freedom has its drawbacks.

CHAPTER V

THE BANKS OF JORDAN

THE storm raged all night long, but passed away as the sun rose clear over a world half under water. An hour or so after sunrise James Harte came to the desolate house which the Jay-Hawkers had raided. He and his horse were covered with mud, and they looked as if they had come both fast and far. Entering the sitting room, where Aunt Monin was coaxing Nancy to drink a cup of coffee, he went straight up to her, and, taking both her hands in his big palms, said:

“Nancy, we’ve heard how you’ve been raided.”

“My father lies there, murdered,” said Nancy, pointing to the next room.

“I swear to avenge his murder,” said Harte. Nancy’s eyes, dulled by a night of weeping, gave a flash as he said these words.

“I’ll avenge his death until the prairie rings with it. And then, Nancy, I’ll come to you for my reward.”

“I don’t even know who killed him. I tried to fire the gun myself, but Aunt Monin struck up the barrel,” said Nancy in great agitation. She had hardly spoken since the tragedy of the day before, and now her nervous excitement began to get the better of her, and her hands trembled piteously, although she tried hard to keep them locked together.

“Poor Nancy!” said the young man, looking at her pityingly; “I’m glad you didn’t.”

“Why?”

“Because then I couldn’t have shot him myself, and I want to avenge you, Nancy. I can do that to show my love. It’s the first thing that I ever could do that you wanted. I’m glad old Aunt Monin struck up the gun.”

“You’ll never be able now to find the right man. We sha’n’t ever know who it was,” answered Nancy.

“I’ll make sure and get him, anyhow,” replied Harte with a significance that was entirely lost on Nancy, absorbed in her own sad thoughts. “I came to tell you the State militia’s called out. We’re going on the track of the Jay-Hawkers right away.”

“Aren’t you a free-state man?” asked Nancy with some slight show of interest.

“I ain’t now, I can tell you. I never had this chance before. I don’t care who it was raided your farm, Nancy; I’m going ’long with the men to hunt ’em down.” Harte made out, of course, that all this zeal was for love of Nancy. He did not feel it necessary to explain that he was under the obligation to give some striking proof of his loyalty to his Missouri neighbours, if he wished to escape their animosity. He was a suspected man, and he had to be extra zealous in order to turn away suspicion from himself. The best proof he could give was by joining in the pursuit of the retreating Jay-Hawkers. If he could but avenge Overton’s murder he would have such a hold on Nancy’s gratitude that she would find it hard to say him nay, and he could not disguise the fact from himself that hitherto he had made very slight progress in her regard, notwithstanding all his wooing. He determined not to let this opportunity slip.

“How many men were here, can you tell me? It will help us some to know how many there are out,” said he.

"I only saw the one who came into the house," answered the poor girl with a spasm of pain. "Aunt Monin saw them; she can tell you."

Aunt Monin, who had all along been in the room, apparently inattentive to what was going on, but in reality absorbed in listening to every word, now looked up in innocent surprise.

"Well, now, 'bout how many men were there, as near as you can calculate?" he asked of the old negress.

"Wal, Mas'r Jeemes, I was jess stan'in' on de sta'r step o' de po'ch a-lookin' an' a-lookin' down de road fo' ter see de sight o' de men an' hosses an' guns shu."

Now Aunt Monin knew perfectly well that there were five white men and no more engaged in the raid, but she was not going to let on, not she.

"Was there a big gang—fifty?" suggested Harte.

"I dunno fo' shu, mas'r. It's dre'ful 'tickler work countin' men when dey's ridin' roun' permisc'us, an' cavortin' ebbery which way. Dey go like streak lightnin' an' clap roun' like thunder. I'se powerful cute in reck'nin' chickuns an' mos' nebber misses nary one, but men an' hosses an' guns is long sight more skeery work to reckon. I hain't nebber seed hunderd men so close, pressin' slap up 'gin de bars, in my life befo', an' I was sorter skeered an' blinded by de flashin' o' de rifles. I dunno jess how many dey was, mas'r."

"Where in blazes did they raise a hundred men out of that dried up country I should like to know?" muttered Harte with a puzzled frown.

He left Nancy a few minutes later and rode off to join his neighbours, who under the command of the county marshal were turning out with wrath to pursue the Jay-Hawkers. The news of the raid had spread like wildfire, and some twenty men were already assembled. Now, although Harte did not in the least imagine that a hundred men could have been at Overton's farm, still

he felt sure there must have been a great number engaged in the raid for such a powerful impression to have been produced upon Aunt Monin's mind as was evidently the case. Harte was no match for Aunt Monin, and indeed a free man seldom is a match in cunning for a slave. Cunning is the slave's only weapon of either offence or defence, and they had had several generations in which to cultivate it to perfection at the time when Aunt Monin lived.

The young man soon overtook his companions splashing along through the muddy roads.

"Git any news o' them ab'lish'nists?" asked one of the men with an oath.

"Not much. Only there's been a heap of them over yonder."

This information seemed to excite the fury of the party, who broke out into a variety of oaths and threats.

"The cowardly blue-bellied Yankees! Jess let me git at 'em!" one would say; "I reckon I'd raise the top off his head with this hyar tool pretty 'tarnel spry, so I would!"

"Them Free-soilers better not open their mouths nigh me," another would reply. "Reckon I'd light a bullet down his throat mighty peart, so I would. I'm a mighty keurious customer, I am, when my dander is riz, by thunder!"

And so on and so forth, with threat after threat expressed in more or less extravagant language. Beguiling the time in this way, the twenty men rode in pursuit of the Jay-Hawkers. It is sometimes said that brave men don't brag. It is not considered good form among certain classes, but it would be a vast mistake, however, to infer that because these men boasted and bragged of what they would do they were necessarily cowards. On the contrary, they were both courageous and remorseless. They were prepared to risk their own

lives in order to punish the raiders, but assuredly if they caught one, no matter even if wounded or unarmed, they would kill him without the slightest hesitation. Border wars are always waged in a ruthless fashion.

And the Jay-Hawkers? What of them?

We left the negroes spending their first night of freedom in rain and regret. At the earliest gleam of daylight Mills and his son rode on to the creek to inspect the ford. The elder man knew pretty certainly what must have happened, but he wished to see with his own eyes. Under ordinary conditions Mine Creek is a river of quite fordable dimensions. During the recent drought, indeed, it had ceased being a river at all, and was merely a succession of pools and dry ridges, like the track of an avalanche. But Kansas soil is firm in character, so that when it rains after a long spell of dry weather the water runs away about as fast as if it fell upon a cement floor. That is what happened now. Every stream and rivulet which owed allegiance to Mine Creek rushed into it with an accumulated debt of waters that filled that hard-pressed river to the utmost. It rose with appalling rapidity, and whereas on the preceding day it had been a dry rocky valley, when Mills and his son inspected it Mine Creek was a raging torrent, ten feet deep, sweeping trees and stones down in the wild swirl of its muddy waters.

The two men stood for some time gazing at the roaring torrent, then they retraced their steps to where the miserable camp was. The elder man said never a word, and after a length of time Tom Mills put his thoughts into articulate language.

“Reckon we hain’t got nothin’ ‘cept a rifle bullet as ‘ud cross Mine Creek now.”

“Reckon rifle bullets’ll be slingin’ round mighty spry afore night,” replied his parent.

“ ‘Low them Missouri men’ll turn out to-day?’ ” inquired Tom with some trepidation of manner.

“ They’ll be ‘long afore sundown,” ” answered his father.

“ What are you goin’ to do, dad? ”

“ Fight,” ” was the laconic answer.

When Mills reported the state of the river there was consternation among the Jay-Hawkers. Heaton wanted to try higher up for a ford. The taciturn leader made no observation in reply to this proposal, but only shook his head. So Heaton set out to try higher up, and after an exhausting struggle returned to say that he could not possibly make his way without an axe to cut through the tangled undergrowth of grapevines and small bushes. Then Mills informed him there were steep banks for ten miles on either side, and that this was the only place for crossing. Mills was occupied in carefully peering at the ground and scrutinizing the bushes that grew alongside the track. He seemed to look with such anxiety that at last Heaton asked him if he had lost anything.

“ No, hain’t lost nothin’; am tryin’ to find something,” ” replied he, somewhat to Heaton’s bewilderment.

“ What? ”

“ Tracks.” ”

“ Tracks of what? ” ” asked Heaton, who found the information conveyed by his leader in altogether too concentrated a form to be readily assimilated. Mills looked at the young man in some pity at requiring an explanation of what was so extremely obvious.

“ Tracks o’ the rest o’ the men, to see if they’ve got ‘long ‘fore us. If they’re behind an’ comin’ this way, we’ll fix the Missourians yet, for we’re ‘bout as good as any twenty men anywhere round here, and we’ve got twenty reg’lar downright pretty rifles. If they ain’t behind us, reckon the Missourians’ll fix us mos’ likely.” ”

Heaton felt his spirits rise at the thought of an unequal fight, where the inequality would be against him. He would then be able to shake off the recollection of that awful scene of yesterday where the fight had been no fight at all, but only one quick shot with all the advantages on his side. He endeavoured to look for tracks too, but the search was fruitless. The storm had swept them away, even supposing there had been any.

“ Guess we’ll kinder say we’re a-lookin’ out for ‘em, anyhow,” observed Mills. “ It’ll help keep the women and children from screechin’. We’ll git ‘long down to the river so we can’t be surrounded, an’ we’ll put the wagon in the middle an’ do what men an’ rifles can to defen’ ourselves.”

When the negroes, now somewhat revived by the sunshine, beheld the swollen flood of Mine Creek they were struck with the eternal fitness of things, and at once set up a spontaneous chorus of Glory, halleluiah! We’s come to de Ribber Jordan. We’s stan’in’ on de banks lookin’ out into de promise’ lan’.”

The enthusiastic chanting of this song engaged their attention for a long time, so that they did not much heed what the white men were doing, but whooped and sang and danced around in the splashy mud, completely happy at being in sight of the “ promise’ lan’.” The white men, on the other hand, were very little inclined to sing and whoop, but proceeded with their work in grave silence. They pulled the wagon to the side of the road and endeavoured to hide it by means of branches and saplings piled up against it. There were plenty of torn and broken trees lying around after the storm, so that a very skilful ambuscade was soon constructed.

By and bye Mills told them the rest of the Jay-Hawkers would soon be along now, and he intimated

with some asperity that they had had enough of whooping and howling, and were to be quiet. The negroes, accustomed to unquestioning obedience when under the eye of the master, cowered down in and around the wagon. A feed of corn and cold corn bread was dealt out to horse and man. It was the last they had.

“I ‘low we’d better look to our pistols and rifles, an’ git our caps ready. There ain’t much more time for foolin’, ‘cordin’ to my calkilation o’ things. We can look out now,” said Mills to his companions. Heaton could not but be struck by the extraordinary silence with which they seemed to receive the situation. There was no arguing, no giving of opinions and supporting them with wordy eagerness. Each man seemed satisfied with the decisions of the leader—at all events, they accepted them and obeyed them with almost military silence. The young Eastern man was the only one to talk and make comments.

“We can begin to look out now,” repeated Mills softly, as if to himself.

“For the Jay-Hawkers,” said Heaton with a poor attempt at mirth.

“For the Jay-Hawkers, if the Lord is good to us, but I don’t count on that much when it comes to fighting,” replied Mills, without any conscious irreverence. His mind was too intent on the hard facts of the situation for him to pay much attention to the niceties of language.

“Any good getting those negroes to lend a hand at the fighting?” inquired Heaton, looking with longing eyes upon the stalwart frame of Cæsar.

“Ptcha! No. Niggers can’t fight,” said Mills with contempt. “Slaves never do. Fightin’ is work for free men.”

“I don’t know that. They have fought sometimes, and gallantly too, in ancient times,” replied Heaton,

drawing from his reading of past ages and not from his knowledge of existing negroes.

“Don’t know nothin’ ‘bout past times, an’ don’t want to,” said Mills with huge contempt; “but I do know ‘bout niggers, an’ they don’t fight. If you let on to them darkies as we’re calc’latin’ to have a fight with the Missouri men, they’ll set up such a screechin’ as ‘ull bring the whole swarm o’ them down slap on us. If we can jess manage to hang on an’ keep them pesky Missourians back till to-morrow mornin’, I calc’late we can swim that stream by the time the sun’s three hours high. My horse there is the peartest swimmer in Linn County, an’ he’ll do it seven times with two on his back every time. Guess the others’ll do it four times, and the colts once each, an’ that’ll take the whole parcel o’ them across; babies an’ childern don’t make no great differ when it comes to swimmin’.”

Mills chewed meditatively at a stick of thunder-wood, looking the while sharply from beneath his shaggy eyebrows along the road that led out of the wood. All was as quiet and peaceful as if no such convulsions as storms were possible. The trees were motionless, for the wind had died completely away. Flecks of sunlight glinted between the branches and fell slanting into the muddy pools. The negroes were peering uneasily from among the boughs that hid the wagon. Cæsar stood in front of the barricade and seemed in doubt what to do. Near him was that active young darky who had declared he was “nebber gwine ter wo’k no mo’,” a boast which Mills had remembered against him, and in consequence of which he had kept that mistaken youth incessantly employed in every conceivable job, until he heartily regretted his uncomfortable state of freedom.

“Those niggers has begun to smell out something,” remarked Mills. “Here you, Jake,” this to the darky

already mentioned; "jess you light out an' git up to the high prairie, an' climb a tree at the edge of the woods, an' see if you can see anything comin' 'long the road from Boomsville. If you make out a gang of 'bout fifteen men comin' 'long, you jess pike back as hard as you can lick, so as we can be gitting sorter ready for 'em," concluded Mills with a grim smile.

Jake swung off at a coon's trot and was speedily lost to sight among the trees. Mills and his four companions then carefully selected the place from which they were to defend the little camp, each man deciding precisely where he would fire from, so as to be ready to spring into position the moment it should become necessary. Their simple plan was to form a wide semi-circle in front of the wagon and to fire from behind the trees. Mill's only hope was that if they could so conceal themselves as to be absolutely unseen, it was just possible, if startled by a sudden attack, that the Missourians might back out of what would appear to them as an ambuscade. It was but a poor chance, yet it was his only one, for it had now become evident that the rest of the Jay-Hawkers were either on before them out of reach of harm or help, or else that they were themselves hiding somewhere along the river. Mills had only himself to depend upon to get him out of the hobble in which he found himself.

Meanwhile the afternoon was wearing on, and Jake did not return.

Mills approached Cæsar where he was leaning against a tree with his great arms folded across his huge chest. Susannah just behind the screen of branches was crooning her baby to sleep.

"Think that boy Jake 'ud go to sleep in a tree when he was set to watch for men?" he asked.

"Dat ar Jake, him pison lazy nigga," replied Cæsar with scorn. "I go see dey comin', mas'r."

Off he darted through the woods like a wild boar, crashing along with fierce energy. He soon reached the edge of the timber, and there, not a mile away, coming on at an easy trot over the brow of the hill, was a band of horsemen sure enough. One startled cry escaped from Cæsar's big lips as his practised eye told him these were not Kansas Jay-Hawkers returning from a raid, but Missouri farmers out in pursuit of themselves. Back through the woods he dashed, his eyes starting from their sockets, his wide nostrils distended with panting gasps.

"Mas'r, mas'r!" he cried, bounding up to Mills; "dey ain't de Free-soilers; dey's Missouri slave catchers out on de hunt."

"I know it, my poor fellow; those are the men I've been lookin' for. Git 'long into the bush an' hide," said Mills, looking at his twitching face with compassion.

"No, mas'r, I ain't gwine ter run. Hain't yer got a bowie knife ter gi' me? I can do a heap with a bowie knife."

"Not much against rifles, but here is one for you. The Lord have mercy on you. It's a bad lookout."

"I'll kill one white man 'fore I die," said Cæsar, as he twirled his knife savagely over his head.

The tramp of horses was now heard in the distance.

Each man silently took up his position in the appointed place.

The tramp grew louder, and the faithless Jake shivered in terror as he hid in his tree. He also had recognised the enemy and, too frightened to do aught but seek to save himself, had crept up higher into the tree, and lay there, scarcely breathing, while twenty men rode down into the woods of Mine Creek, where five Jay-Hawkers and one negro with a knife were waiting to receive them.

CHAPTER VI

BACK INTO SLAVERY

“THERE’S nigger tracks!” exclaimed Harte, who was riding in the front rank beside the county marshal. He pointed to the splashy mud alongside the road, where a hundred footmarks showed the spot in which the negroes had been paddling about during the earlier part of the day.

“Them dog-gauned Free-soilers, I guess they’re skulkin’ roun’ hyar in the brushwood,” said the marshal, calling a halt.

Five pairs of Free-soil eyes, whether “dog-gauned” or not I can not say, were at that moment staring straight at the perplexed marshal, and five rifles were levelled at him and his men, only waiting for the word of command to empty their contents in their unsuspecting bodies.

“I ’low them blamed Jay-Hawkers hain’t passed ’long this road many hours back,” observed one of the men, bending well down over his horse’s neck and staring into the road. “The mud hain’t settled in these hyar tracks.”

The marshal and five men rode cautiously forward.

“They might be anywherees roun’ hyar; the creek is too high for fordin’. Hyar, you fellers, jess beat the bush an’ drive the ’tarnel varmints out inter the open whar we can shoot ’em down handy.”

When the marshal gave that order he did not know

that he was broadside on to Mills's rifle, not forty yards away, but he soon found it out.

"Fire!" came in a loud voice, and instantly the woods rang with the sound of firearms.

"Damnation!" said the marshal, as his arm dropped by his side with a bullet through the elbow joint. His horse had kicked at a botfly just as Mills had pulled the trigger, which had in all probability saved the rider's life. One man pitched heavily out of his saddle and lay still in the mud; another was thrown by his wildly rearing horse, maddened by a bullet wound in the nostril. They turned and galloped back to the rest of the party behind.

"The brush is alive with Jay-Hawkers; we'd better turn back and wait for the regulars from Fort Leavenworth," said the marshal, losing his blood and his nerve at the same moment.

"There warn't more nor ten men fired or I'll bust," said a young fellow who had kept his wits about him.

The Missourians evinced a tendency to deliberate. They were doubtful about the numbers they might have against them, though not at all doubtful of their own courage when pitted against an equal force.

"Whose for wiping out the murdering, thieving scoundrels?" cried Harte. "Remember Overton. Not one of you'll be safe from Jay-Hawkers if we don't make an end of these now, so that they'll never dare to show their Yankee noses over the border again. Who'll follow me?"

A leader was all that they wanted, and a hoarse shout of approval greeted the young man's words.

"You darned fools, be you goin' to run slap into a trap?" said one of the older and more cautious men.

"Spread out an' take 'em in the rear," said Harte. "This way, boys!"

He struck into the bush where the undergrowth was

thinnest, and was followed by four or five others, while an equal number dived into the woods on the opposite side of the road. This manœuvre did not escape the penetration of Mills, who hurriedly came out of concealment and said to his handful of men:

“It’s all up with us if they close in. Our only chance is to keep outside of them. Spread as much as you can, an’ do what you can. We can’t stan’ agin’ ‘em; they’re fifty strong.” Mills, like leaders of larger forces, exaggerated the strength of the enemy opposed to him. In pursuance of these orders the Jay-Hawkers scrambled through the woods as fast as they could, so as to keep on the outside of their adversaries. A few scattered shots were fired in the brushwood, by whom it was impossible to say. The main body of the Missourians now rode down the track, and when they reached the spot where the first attack had been made and where their companion lay dead in the road they fired right and left into the woods. A scream came from the wagon, where hitherto the negroes had stayed quiet, too frightened to do anything.

“Oh, Lordy, Lordy, don’t shoot, mas’r! We’s on’y po’ nigga women an’ chillun.”

“Don’t kill the niggers,” called out one of the men somewhat unnecessarily, since slaveholders don’t kill negroes unless absolutely driven to it. They are too valuable property.

At this moment Cæsar, who had been watching his opportunity from behind a tree, sprang at a man riding a big black horse. He meant to strike the rider, but only succeeded in stabbing the horse in the chest. The animal reared and then fell forward on its knees, of course throwing the man to the ground, where he lay half stunned. Quick as lightning Cæsar raised his heavy bowie knife and buried it up to the hilt in the man’s back just between the shoulders. The deed was

seen by half a dozen of the fallen man's companions, and half a dozen rifles were aimed at the negro and emptied in a second. But here again the haste of the aim saved Cæsar. Not one of the bullets brought him down, although one laid his cheek open with a ghastly wound, and another hit him in the fleshy part of the shoulder. The sting of the wounds seemed only to fill him with a fury that was not human. He leaped back under cover and hid behind the trees in the thicket, crawling along on his stomach to where Heaton lay in ambush.

"We must clear out of this at once," said the latter to him hurriedly. "We can't do anything against such odds. The others are gone already. I said I'd stay and warn you. Creep along under cover of the river bank—the water is falling—until you come up with Mills. He's gone that way. Good luck! Keep low, don't let the slave catchers get a sight of you or it's all up."

"De Jay-Hawkers gone, mas'r!" said the negro, as he saw Heaton slip under the bushes and creep away. "Den we's gwine ter be slaves again. Dish nigga won't nebber be slave no mo'," he added in a sudden fury. He was only ten steps from the wagon where his wife and boy were, and the slave catchers were almost upon them now. There were bullets pinging through the woods here and there, but the quick crack of Sharpe's carbine was no longer heard, showing that the Jay-Hawkers had abandoned the fight and were retreating. The Missourians were shooting here and there in an aimless way at the foe they had never once seen since the beginning. They mostly hit the trees and frightened each other's horses.

The women and children came out in a shivering little group, huddled together in full view in the road, and implored the mercy of their conquerors. Among

them stood Susannah with her sleeping baby in her arms. A great wave of mad despair surged through poor Cæsar's savage mind as he saw them there—his wife and his child, the only beings he loved in this world, and they were going back to slavery. It came upon him in one awful moment what slavery was. A slave was only a beast to be bought and sold, to be tracked and hunted down, a brute beast with no heart allowed to beat with the emotions of love and affection—nothing but a beast of burden for evermore. And this was to be the fate of his boy—that bright little boy who had awakened his father's pride and had nestled at his father's heart. He would never be allowed to love the child nor even to see him grow up, but as soon as the little creature was able to work he would be sold off to wear away his life in some cotton swamp. These thoughts rushed confusedly through Cæsar's mind as he stood for a moment trying to think. He was fixing his own destiny and that of his boy in that brief moment. The horror of it mounted to his heart. Yes, he could save his boy, and he would save him by the only means left in the slave's power.

Cæsar was not a religious negro, far from it. His was a rebellious, impatient spirit. He refused to believe in Susannah's God, for he was the God of the white man he would say, the God who turned a deaf ear to the wailings of the slave. The meek-spirited wife used often to shudder at his wild ravings against the Lord.

“Dish nigga ain’t gwine ter b’lieve in de Lo’d till he set de niggas free,” Cæsar said more than once in answer to her pleadings. When the Jay-Hawkers began to run off slaves out of Missouri in order to set them free in Kansas Cæsar came to believe it might be the hand of the Lord that was uplifted for them at last.

But in that grim hour when the Jay-Hawkers crept

away under the bank of Mine Creek and left the slaves to the mercy of their captors Cæsar's wild heart broke within him. The Lord was not going to save them—that was clear to his comprehension. All was lost. Still there was the boy. That little innocent creature, perhaps the Lord would look after the little child and have mercy upon it if it were given into his hands. Some confused imagery remained in his mind about crossing the River Jordan and going into some land of promise toward which the negroes were eagerly striving, and about which they sang their rude songs. If the little helpless child were sent alone into the promised land, surely the God in whom Susannah believed and to whom she prayed would receive it and cherish it.

He sprang to where the negroes stood crying for mercy. He was a horrid object. A great wound in his jaw covered his face with blood, and a piece of flesh, like an awful blister, hung red against his black neck. Streams of blood came from his shoulder, but his mighty strength was not yet spent. With a howl like a wild beast he dashed up to his wife, seized the sleeping child from her arms and rushed to the river brink. Taking the infant by one little round leg, he swung it over his head and sent it with a mighty sweep far out into the stream. It plunged head foremost into the yellow flood and disappeared.

It had never even awakened into consciousness out of its sleep, so swift was the rush that had jerked it from its mother's bosom into eternity. Susannah, with an awful cry, fell face forward and lay without moving in the muddy road. Cæsar, like a wounded boar, turned and charged down the road straight at his pursuers. His huge frame was beginning to stagger now, but he rushed with his bowie knife in his hand raised ready to strike. He reached the foremost rider and flung up his

knife just as two rifle bullets passed through and through his body. The knife sped straight enough, but the hand that hurled it was quivering in its last pulses. The bowie knife stuck in the thick homespun coat beneath the leather belt, but only grazed the skin of the harshest slave owner in all Missouri.

Cæsar fell shot through the heart, and the horses trampled his quivering body into the yellow mud.

He had killed one white man and saved his boy from slavery. His wild and savage heart lay still enough now, and would never plan murders and burnings and fierce revenges for the wrongs of his race as it had so often done in the untamed days of his youth. He was only a savage with a savage's courage and also a savage's ferocity, but under other circumstances he might have been a hero and made a famous name. As it was, he was only a rebellious slave who was killed in a fight, and whose body was trampled to pieces by the horses' feet.

The Missourians surrounded the little group of terrified slaves and with the butt ends of their guns struck them indiscriminately about the head and shoulders. Pitiful cries and screams for mercy were raised, but in truth very few of the slaves received any serious damage. They were adepts at howling, and also adepts at dodging. Had there been any full-grown men among them these would have fared ill, for the Missourians were so infuriated by the death of their comrade at the hands of Cæsar that they would have been apt to avenge his death upon the first able-bodied negro they came across. As it was, the men had all escaped—Jake in a tree, Cæsar by death, and the two others by crawling off into the brushwood.

Uncle Deedy was still there—poor old Uncle Deedy, who was roused up into a state of unwonted animation by all the noise and confusion, so that he began to sing

in a cracked old voice a hymn of his own making, to the effect that he too, "was gwine down de Ribber Jordan inter de promise' lan', whar he seen de angels a-washin' o' der white-robe' gowns."

"Shut up, you dodderin' ole fool!" cried one of the men, menacing him with his rifle butt. Uncle Deedy, absolutely unconscious of all that was going on, only sang the louder, whereupon the man gave him a knock on the head. The blow would scarcely have been felt by a hardy nigger lad, but Uncle Deedy was ninety years old, and it killed him on the spot.

"Just as well to be rid of him; he only ate up the corn bread and did no good," remarked the man, with philosophy. "Here, pitch him into the river; them young colts is powerful skeered o' dead niggers."

The old man's body was therefore pitched into the river. Thus the youngest and the oldest of that forlorn party of slaves crossed the River Jordan and entered into their promised land.

Late that night a miserable herd of negroes was driven into the yard at Overton's farm, and Nancy was bidden out to receive back her property.

"We hain't got 'em all. We had to shoot that big nigger o' yourn, Cæsar, 'cause he fought like the devil an' killed ole man Smith with a bowie knife. Three others run clean off, an' one ole one an' a baby was drowned in the creek. Sorry we hain't cotched 'em all." The speaker was the owner of the next farm to Nancy's home.

"Did you kill him?" asked the young girl, with hurried emphasis on the pronoun.

"Who? Cæsar?"

"No. My father's murderer—did you kill him?"

"Wal, we can't rightly say," replied the same speaker as before, but with considerable hesitation of manner. "We done a heap o' shootin', an' I 'low some-

body mus' ha' been hit, 'cause we hearn an almighty screech. We jess come up to them at the crossin' o' Mine Creek, an' it's pretty close timber thar, an' kinder difficult to git the drop on a man."

"How many Jay-Hawkers were there?" asked Nancy.

"We didn't get a good sight o' them, so we can't say for certain, but the woods was just full o' them—we could tell by the shootin'," replied a voice from among the horsemen which Nancy recognised as that of James Harte.

"Dere was jess five men, mas'r," said one of the re-captured negroes. "We seed 'em all day long. Dey was five men, an' one warn't on'y de size of a small b'y."

Nancy gave a quick scornful laugh.

"You are valiant men—especially you, James Harte. Your vengeance is indeed likely to make the prairie ring. To say that twenty Missouri men couldn't catch five Kansas Jay-Hawkers! You ought to be proud men to-night."

With another quick scornful laugh she turned on the heel and entered the house.

CHAPTER VII

THE BRAND OF CAIN

HEATON returned to his lonely cabin beyond Keokuk, a sadder man after the abortive Jay-Hawker raid, but not necessarily a wiser one. Sadness and wisdom are not interchangeable terms. The first does not always involve the second, for experience may be fruitful in sorrow without supplying the sufferer with any more infallible guide for future conduct than he had before. The shot which he had fired with such fatal aim in that farmhouse down in Missouri had dealt a death wound to some of his most cherished opinions. Brought up in an atmosphere of almost militant abolitionism, Heaton had come to Kansas full of enthusiasm and determined to do what he could to right the great wrong of slavery. He felt it to be the nation's curse, which it was his sacred duty to lessen as far as in him lay.

Charlie Heaton was just twenty-four, and his generous blood had been stirred by the accounts of John Brown's exploits in Kansas—exploits that had become all the more noble in the minds of most men since John Brown had set the seal of martyrdom on his opinions. No bold-spirited man having abolitionist views could help having his admiration aroused, nor prevent his heart beating in quick response to the story of John Brown's life and death. It was just the very impulse to start a young fellow like Charlie Heaton on a course of similar dangerous philanthropy. The war in Kansas

was a tempting scene for such an actor to make his *début*. Not that he went to Kansas with a definite idea of taking part in that irregular and savage struggle. On the contrary, being a man of refined feeling, he determined in his own mind to keep clear of fighting. But he also determined to lend a hand in any work for the freeing of the slaves. That was a noble object, and, as far as one man could, he would devote his energy, ay, his life, to accomplishing the task.

With his mind set in this way, Charlie arrived in Kansas in the May of 1860, and in the following October, as we have seen, he joined his first Jay-Hawking raid. Five months on the prairie had modified the opinions he had brought with him from the East. He was just as enthusiastic as ever to make Kansas a free State and to keep the curse of slavery from her borders, but he was more lenient toward the fighting Free-soilers than he had been when merely reading about their many questionable exploits in the safe seclusion of his home in Vermont. Still he resolved to keep clear of fighting, as far as he was concerned. This may seem a strange resolution on the part of a man who was ready to join the Jay-Hawkers, but he had much to learn.

When starting on the raid he had undoubtedly contemplated the possibility of a conflict with the slave owners, and had armed himself with due care for such a contingency. The conflict of his imagination, however, had always been in the open, with the odds against his side. It had never once taken on the hideous form of accomplished facts, wherein he was the stealthy attacker, and where a half-sleeping old man was shot in his own house. Charlie was young, he was a dreamer, he was ambitious. He saw around him a great evil against which his heart revolted. He dreamed that he might help to overcome that evil. He saw himself act-

ing a not ignoble part in the great drama, and his mind received the meed of its own praise.

For my part I am sorry for these young dreamers. To them the world is a great stage with all the freshness of their young ambitions concealing its bedraggled scenery. They see themselves taking a leading part, they fancy themselves commanding the applause of a nation and shaping the world's history, and then suddenly they find themselves knocked aside, they know not how, by some unexpected *coup de théâtre*. The bedraggled scenery stands revealed in all its cob-webs and dust to their disillusioned eyes, and they discover that they were never in a leading part at all, but that quite other actors are at work the whole time aiming after quite another *dénouement*. Poor young dreamers!

Of course the Jay-Hawkers did not blame Heaton for his act when once they understood it was a case of "shooting first"; but acquittal by his neighbours was not enough for him. Charlie wanted acquittal by his own conscience. He prized above all else the approval of his best self. He did not shrink from mentally arguing out the subject. He lived quite alone, so he had plenty of time in which to thrash out the question very fully, and the more he thrashed it the harder it became for him to prove satisfactorily to himself how his shooting of the Missourian differed from mere murder.

The old man was dozing in his chair when he, Charlie Heaton, fully armed, came suddenly upon him and demanded that he should give up his slaves, who were no doubt his most valuable property—property moreover, that was recognised by all the laws of the country. True, Heaton did not approve of slavery, held it in abhorrence indeed, but there were other kinds of wealth beside slaves amassed by means of which he also disapproved in a high degree. He set up a law

unto himself, and because the man had refused to surrender his property and had evinced a determination to defend it Heaton had killed him. How was this to be distinguished from robbery with violence, followed by murder? After this terrible summing up, the unhappy young man lived over again in imagination that awful moment when he had seen the gun barrel rising and had pulled his own trigger, and the man had fallen backward on the floor.

He used to speculate by the hour as to what had been the fate of the girl whose wail of agony would wake him at times out of the soundest sleep. Had he deprived her of her only support in the world? He had heard the men say there were only the two at the farm. Certainly he saw no one else. But then he never saw even that grief-stricken girl, although she must have been near enough; he only heard her voice. And was she now left desolate, and by his hand?

Perhaps that wailing cry which haunted him so was in reality the source and origin of much of his mental arguments. His dreams of following, however distantly, in the footsteps of John Brown, and of freeing slaves by the score were rudely dispelled by that cry of despair. To bring off a load of slaves into freedom and to see them caper with joy and shout and clap their hands at being under a free sky where no man might call them his was an inspiriting performance. But this was not what he had done. There were no slaves liberated. On the contrary, those whom they had brought a little way along the rough road to freedom were back again in slavery and in a much worse plight than before, and Heaton, instead of inspiring recollections, had only that grief-stricken cry of a fatherless girl to bring back with him to his solitary cabin near Keokuk. He had not brought a single slave into freedom; he had carried desolation to a happy home.

This, then, was the sorry end reached by an enthusiast determined to do his level best to undo a great national wrong. It had one immediate result, however, and that was to fix him in a resolution never again to join in a Jay-Hawkers' raid. To do evil that good may come was one of those insidious doctrines of the Romish Church against which his Puritan blood instinctively rebelled. He had committed a murder that good might result. No good had resulted, but only evil, and the brand of Cain was on his brow. If the evil of slavery was to be done away with, it could only be by a great national uprising, and not by isolated acts of vengeance. One ride with the Jay-Hawkers had been enough to cure him of the notion that their rough and spasmodic efforts were going to do any permanent good.

Meanwhile the young man felt a longing that was rapidly becoming overmastering, to go back into Missouri and see what had become of that girl. He fancied that if he could only hear her speak, and could look into her face, he might get rid of that wailing cry that so constantly pursued and tormented him both sleeping and waking. He had read in tales of ancient times that when persons were haunted by visions they could best dispel the vision by seeing the actuality of their fancy. This idea, which had at first merely touched his fancy, began ere long to grow into a serious project, so that by Christmas he had firmly resolved to put it into execution. It was a mad scheme, considering the disturbed state of the country, and one that could only arise in a mind that had brooded too long in loneliness over a subject that caused deep emotion. For Heaton was emotional in that quiet, self-contained way which can only be the long piled-up inheritance of puritanically repressed natures. He imagined for himself a whole series of pictures of what had been and what was the life history of that girl whom he had never seen, but

whose voice he had heard, and around that fanciful image, quite unconsciously to him, began to cluster those little formless impulses which are the first mysterious guides on the road to love. It must be remembered he was a young man, and he lived alone, his mind dwelling continually on an image of his own creation. The image became part of his daily life and thought; he began to know it, to pity it, and to love it for the very pity which he gave it.

And this man who was on the point of setting out on a search for an utterly unknown girl by the sound of her voice, this man who was going to run into very palpable danger of losing his life in order to silence a sound that existed only in his imagination, was Charlie Heaton, the Vermont Puritan, who had been brought up amid the hardest and most unemotional surroundings, in that arid region of self-satisfied religious egotism and repression, where romance is shunned as the lure of the evil one, and love admitted as an ill that must be borne for the purposes of social continuity! Nature is strong, however, and has frequently proved too powerful for the bonds of hard asceticism. The unused poetry of the young man's soul, which had been lying by and accumulating during his whole life, now rushed forth and took this romantic, this almost quixotic form.

Now, although the projected trip and the motive for it might both be considered devoid of common sense, Heaton's Vermont nature came to the rescue in assisting him to work out the practical details of the scheme. Why he went was known but imperfectly even to himself, but the manner of his going was sensible enough. He had let his beard grow after the raid, so that by the middle of January he had very effectually concealed a handsome mouth and a pair of well-cut lips. He did not wish to run the risk of being recognised by

any chance Missourian who might have seen him in the preceding autumn. He might be quixotic and ready to devote his life if he could atone to the girl whose home he had destroyed, but this sentiment did not extend to the extreme of letting himself be shot if he could help it. So he set off with his gun on his shoulder and a chunk of cold corn bread and some dried beef in his pocket. He would go as a hunter in order to give a peaceful excuse for the gun, and as he was an exceptionally good walker the expedition presented no great difficulties until he reached the border.

Starting due east from his little log cabin, he skirted the high prairie of Keokuk, and kept along the edge of the Big Sugar Creek woods. Occasionally he was overtaken and passed by other wayfarers moving in more speedy fashion on horseback; but as the day wore on he began to realize that he was alone on the prairie. Considering that it was the month of January, the weather might be said to be warm, but it would be cold enough sleeping on the frost-bound ground with no extra covering, so he began to look out rather anxiously for any signs of human habitation. A cabin deserted by one of the settlers which the drought had driven out would do at a pinch, but he would prefer an inhabited cabin with the attendant possibilities of warmth and food.

A thin spiral of blue smoke which he detected issuing from the woods that stretched beneath him in the bottom lands looked hopeful, and he made for it with all speed. Somewhat to his surprise he came upon an Indian lodge cosily nestling among the trees, a sight the more unexpected as he imagined the Indians were all gone out of the country.

A shrill scream, with a deeper toned "Ho, ho, ho!" proclaimed that he was discovered. Since he came as one asking a favour, Heaton thought he had better pro-

claim his peaceful character in terms not likely to be misunderstood. He therefore reversed his rifle, and, carrying it butt end uppermost, walked straight up to the entrance of the wigwam.

A savage face streaked with red and yellow and two glaring eyes met his view, as also the end of a flint-pointed arrow. The young man nevertheless walked steadily forward, noting the while that the arrow did not seem very aggressively aimed. A tall, lanky savage with nothing on but a bead belt and some red paint stepped out of the lodge, and Heaton immediately offered him his hand to shake. The savage seized his hand with a hoarse "Wo, hough sough kee," of welcome, and immediately three other persons came out of the wigwam. These likewise shook hands, with various grunts expressive of various degrees of satisfaction at the unexpected pleasure of his visit. Heaton put his rifle against the centre pole of the lodge, and sat down with the family upon the ground. The chief savage, seeing there was no occasion for personal prowess in overcoming an enemy, resumed his blanket, which the keen air made him draw closely around his shoulders. His wife, who was dressed in a blue skirt, handed him his best leather gaiters embroidered with porcupine quills, and then laced them up for him. After this she spread over both men a warm buffalo robe, and reached them down the calumet of peace, which the Indian and Heaton smoked in turn and in complete silence.

There was a flat-faced child in leather drawers and tiny blanket waddling about the lodge, and he at once made friends with the visitor. He climbed up his knees and pulled open his necktie, being seemingly much diverted by the incomprehensible way in which that article of man's adornment elongated itself whenever he pulled one end. The child looked in vain on Heaton's fingers for those rings which adorned his father's hands

by the dozen. He was consoled, however, for his disappointment on this score by the discovery of a pocket magnifier, and gazed earnestly at the strange sight of his own dirty finger tips when magnified fifteen diameters.

The squaw roasted several ears of corn in the hot wood ashes, between two flat stones, and Heaton offered some strips of his dried beef to his hosts. Together they made a silent but sustaining meal, and after supper he retired to the sheltered side of the tent and slept soundly in a bed of pulled prairie grass covered by an Indian buffalo robe. Indians are supposed to be treacherous devils, but Heaton, although his gun would have been a valuable prize and his throat easy to cut as he slept, never experienced a shadow of uneasiness as he lay under the shelter of the red man's tent. In the morning he took leave of his hosts after an interchange of mutually unintelligible compliments and a more intelligible gift of tobacco on his part. The little boy ran after him and clung round his legs, mutely imploring another look at the magnifier; and the mother ran after the boy, no doubt saying, in Indian language, "You naughty child, you mustn't climb up the gentleman's legs and muddy his clothes," as is the practice of mothers the world over.

Some time after leaving the Indians Heaton overtook a man driving an ox wagon, which is the slowest mode of progression known to civilization. He was walking alongside his team gee-hawing in true Western style when the pedestrian came up with his long swinging gait. The opportunity of beguiling a tedious hour was too good to be lost, so the man hailed him with eagerness.

"Say, stranger, be yer gwine ter cross the creek, anyhow? Guess the water's pretty tole'ble high."

"I've got to ford it somewhere," answered Heaton.

"Meet ary track o' Injuns?" asked the man.

"Yes; there are some back there," replied the young man, jerking his thumb over his shoulder.

"Land!" exclaimed the man in evident alarm. "Be they headin' this way?"

Heaton smiled with some contempt, and then said: "One of them did indeed run after me as I was coming away."

"Hope you killed him, stranger," said the man earnestly.

"Good Lord, no!" said Heaton aghast. "It was only a little child, who wanted to play with my necktie."

His companion, somewhat ashamed, felt it incumbent upon him to explain.

"I ain't nary lick afeard o' Injuns," he remarked complacently, "on'y I'd ruther keep tracks a little ways off a set o' salvagerous onairthly coons. Reckon ary one o' them comin' this yer way, stranger?"

"No. They were in their tent, and I didn't see any signs of marching. I stayed there last night, had supper with them, and slept under one of their buffalo robes. They were as kind as could be."

"Land sakes, stranger! I'd liefer sleep a night 'longside o' ten rattlesnakes nor one Injun," said the man in astonishment at such unheard of temerity.

"Indeed," remarked Heaton contemptuously.

"Calkerlate they'll be some o' them Kickapoos goin' up to their reservation. Was there thund'rin' sight o' guns 'mong 'em? Injuns is powerful wicked when they has guns."

"They only had bows and arrows as far as I could see."

"Reckon I could lick ary heap o' Injuns with bows an' arrows if I hed as good a rifle as yourn," said the man, desirous of regaining the ground he felt he might have lost in Heaton's good opinion by his too mani-

fest exhibition of alarm. He, on the other hand, only anxious to be rid of a disagreeable companion, did not pursue the subject.

"Do you know the country round here? Perhaps you can direct me."

"There ain't nary man this side o' Fort Leavenworth kin tell you more names o' cities nor I kin, stranger. You may lay on that ar," replied he with boastful emphasis.

"I am going east toward the border to hunt deer," remarked Heaton.

"Thar's more cities 'tween hyar an' the Missouri border nor you could find in ary 'nother airthly spot in creation," he said exultingly.

"I didn't know there were so many settlers here. I thought the drought had cleared them out," observed Heaton in some surprise.

"I didn't say thar was settlers," answered the man with a grin; "but thar's a powerful sight o' cities. There's Oak City, an' London, an' Athens plumb ahead o' yer on the track to the border."

"And how many settlers might there be in London?" asked Heaton.

"Nary one, an' never was one."

"Then how shall I know which is London and which is Athens when I get there, if there are no settlers to tell me?" asked Heaton in some amusement.

"Wal, I 'low London City 'ull be easy 'nough, stranger. You'll git thar 'bout noon, an' the trees is pretty nigh all blazed 'roun' whar the city is."

"Is Athens equally well laid out and marked?"

"I reckon Athens hain't got so far 'long yit, an' it won't be so handy fer yer ter know it. You'll git thar 'bout three hours 'fore sundown. The trees ain't blazed, 'cause thar ain't none roun' thar; but you'll see whar two stakes has been druv inter the groun'. May-

be they ain't stan'in' now. But that's Athens City. I am the founder of that city, stranger, an' whar them stakes is driv in is goin' ter be the centre of the city—jess whar the store, an' the post-office, an' the meetin'-house, an' the newspaper office is goin' ter be 'rected."

Heaton thanked the founder of Athens for his information and directions and left him just as his oxen, who had espied a deep mudhole on in front of them in the road, had begun to bellow over the tug and the strain and whip lashings that they knew were immediately in store for them. Oxen are maddening creatures to drive. They are like slaves, skilled in all the tricks and devices known to the cunning mind in order to escape work. They will lie for hours perfectly motionless in the long grass, not even shaking an ear to remove the flies, and this because their master is hunting for them, and they know that head shakes tinkle ox bells, which would at once reveal their presence. They move away when the yoke is raised for their necks, and when at last they are ready to start it is almost a miracle for anything so big to go so slowly. But there is something almost human in their howling with anguish in anticipation when they see a mudhole ahead, out of which they know they must painfully tug their load.

The end of the second day's march brought Heaton well over the border into Missouri. He began to go cautiously, because he perceived that he was an object of suspicion to all whom he met. He was in the enemy's country, and every man would look upon him as a foe. Therefore he gave a wide berth to everything like a settlement if he possibly could. This, however, was not always an easy thing to do, and once he found himself walking right into a small village in full view of some negroes working in a field, and this before he was

aware that there were any houses near. It was a wretched place, with only two or three squalid log cabins in the whole settlement, but these were not uninhabited, as Heaton soon found out. He considered that his safest course was to proceed boldly forward as if he belonged to the place. This he set out to do, but he found that it required all his nerve to walk steadily and sedately forward when he became aware that two men were looking at him from behind a half-open door, and that one of the men had a gun in his hand which he was raising to his shoulder.

Cold chills ran down his back as the young man realized his position. Nothing on earth could save him if the men chose to fire. His only possible chance was to appear completely at his ease. He therefore began to count his steps softly to himself in order to make sure he was not unconsciously hurrying in the slightest degree.

One. Two. Three. Four. He wondered would he get into the twenties before the shot came. Perhaps he would be shot at eleven or twelve. He counted steadily on. He was increasing the range at every step now, and adding to his chances of not being hit. He would have given worlds to look back in order to see if they were aiming at him. But he dared not show even this sign of uneasiness.

Twenty. Twenty-one. He was getting into a long range now. He swayed his body gently, but irregularly, from side to side, as much as he dared, in order to make himself a moving target, if target he was.

Forty. Forty-one. He must be pretty near out of range. His heart stopped thumping, and a cold sweat came out on his forehead.

Those were just the most trying steps he ever remembered to have taken in all his life. He walked on steadily until a turn in the road hid the houses from

sight. Then he went and sat down behind a tree to recover his breath. That slow walk through the village with those two men and their gun pointing at his back had winded him more than the hardest race he ever ran.

CHAPTER VIII

AUNT MONIN'S STORY

AFTER the failure of her neighbours either to kill or capture her father's murderer Nancy seemed to wrap herself up in a sombre mantle of her own sad thoughts. Alone at the farm, except for the companionship of Aunt Monin, she had abundance of time for brooding over her desolation. The old negress offered consolation in her own peculiar fashion, but it was not of a kind to be acceptable to Nancy as yet. She was a hot-tempered girl and a loving one. Her father, the only relative she had in the world, had been cruelly torn from her by a violent death. The very strength of her love made her long for vengeance. She was so lonely, so desolate, so unhappy, that it seemed to her she would not feel such an aching void in her heart if she could have her mind gratified by a signal vengeance. This is a feeling often seen in crude or unformed minds, and Nancy's mind was still very young. But hers was a strong nature, and even when driven by circumstances into a false direction was not one to show any faltering of purpose. She passionately desired vengeance, and could she have met the man who had killed her father she was quite capable of acting herself as the avenger of blood.

Her nature was almost masculine in its fierceness. She had as yet none of the softness of the girl in mind, although her physical form was both soft and feminine

in a marked degree. Her soul was unawakened, and her young life had been cast in rugged lines. Her father had been a stern man, though a just one according to his lights, and all her experience lay with hardness. Aunt Monin alone supplied her with the soft loving elements, without which no young creature can thrive, while the young men who would fall in love with her were regarded by her with indifference. She had no petty vanity to be gratified by their devotion, for she lived very much isolated, and vanity is a growth largely dependent upon the surroundings of a girl, and is not derived from her own inner consciousness. At this stage of her existence Nancy might be rather looked upon as a wild boy, free in fancy and in soul, acknowledging no superior, and not familiar enough with the world and the experience of others to know that one day she would inevitably fall under the spell of the tyrannous master who in the end subdues all creatures. She was just at this repellent stage, feeling no need of love other than that amid which she had grown up, when she was overwhelmed by the catastrophe of her father's death. Love, crushed out by that blow, rose up again in bitter hatred toward the slayer of the one person who was most dear to her.

Aunt Monin preached in vain.

"Leave de vengeance to de Lo'd, Miss Nancy," she would say in reply to her child's oft expressed desire to be revenged on the man who had killed her father. "I will repay, say de Lo'd. Dat mean de Lo'd he run down de Jay-Hawkers when de right time come. Leave it all in de han's o' de Lo'd."

"But I want it to come now in my lifetime," Nancy would say fiercely.

"No, bressed chile, yo' mus' leave it in his han's. He choose his own time for runnin' 'em down. De ways o' de Lo'd is solemn an' slow, dat dey is."

"I want it done now. It is only by the hands of men it can be done. Oh, if I were only a man!"

She clapped her hands angrily together, bewailing her woman's powerlessness.

"Yo' white folks, yo' is mighty unpatient. Yo' dunno how to wait fo' de Lo'd," remarked Aunt Monin, shaking her turbaned head reprovingly. "Yo' ain't larned ter be patient like we niggas. We's bin waitin' fo' de Lo'd all dese y'ars, Miss Nancy, an' he hain't come to us yet. But we's trustin' in him all de while. He come by an' bye fo' shu'."

Nancy had heard such expressions as these from the lips of her old nurse all her life long, and had paid very little heed to them, it must be confessed. It was Aunt Monin's way to be always preaching, and Nancy, having grown up with the preaching, accepted it heedlessly, like the rain and the sunshine, as among those things which were continually happening. Now, however, her attention was made keener by reason of her own suffering, and her point of view also was changed. Slaves had been among the accepted facts of her life, although from a purely intellectual standpoint she was very much inclined to disapprove of slavery, since it was going to lead to trouble and unhappiness among the whites, as was too bitterly proved by those dreadful Jay-Hawk raids. From the slave's point of view Nancy had never considered the matter at all. Her father's slaves were comfortable, they were well cared for, and she dearly loved Aunt Monin. Surely everybody was as happy as she; Nancy desired them to be. This had been her heedless philosophy hitherto. Now, however, her eyes were made to see more clearly by reason of the sharpening of vision which her own sorrow had brought about.

Aunt Monin's preaching suddenly struck home, because Nancy's mind was in a mood to hear it. She

looked long and seriously at her old nurse, as the meaning of her words sank slowly into her mind. Then there was something that the old slave longed for beyond the physical comforts with which she had always been surrounded. Yet Aunt Monin was a petted negro, if ever there was one, not too hard worked, with plenty of all she needed for her simple comforts. Nancy felt a sudden desire to look into her mind to see what were its real thoughts and hopes. She realized all in a moment that she did not know this woman on whose knee she had grown up, so to speak, and about whose feelings and thoughts she had hitherto been so carelessly confident. This awakening to the fact that one in whose daily life we ourselves share is living a life apart from us and of which we have no knowledge, not infrequently creates a feeling of surprise mingled with resentment. This was somewhat the case with Nancy, and her next words took on a form indicative of the feeling.

“Aren’t you happy, Aunt Monin? You are kindly treated, you have all you want, you are fed and clothed and never have to think for the morrow. Surely you ought to be completely happy.”

“Ya, Miss Nancy, don’t yo’ know ‘tain’t havin’ belly full o’ corn makes pusson happy? Niggas ain’t like work oxen; dey wants suthin’ mo’ nor dat.”

“And I love you, Aunt Monin,” said Nancy softly, as if to herself.

“Ah, my honey-chile,” repeated the old woman, with quick response to this show of affection on Nancy’s part, “yo’ is de light o’ my eyes. Yo’ is mo’ ter me dan de whole worl’ beside. Aunt Monin love yo’ wid all her ole heart. De Lo’d he done make our hearts all de same way, Miss Nancy. Dey ain’t black an’ dey ain’t white; dey all de same colour in de sight o’ de Lo’d.”

The old woman fondled her foster child, taking one

of her hands between her own two and patting it, while she made cooing noises like a brooding dove.

"I shouldn't ever want you to go away from me, Aunt Monin," began Nancy.

"I ain't agwine, honey-chile. Befo' de Lo'd I ain't nebber gwine ter leave yo'," interrupted Aunt Monin with passionate earnestness.

"Not even to be free?" asked Nancy, touched by her affection, but still pursuing her own train of ideas.

"No, not even ter be free. I wouldn't go an' be free an' leave my honey-chile. Nebber."

Nancy knew negroes too well not to be able to discount their statements liberally, but a sudden thought struck her as Aunt Monin uttered her solemn protestation.

"How is it you didn't go away with the others? Didn't you know they thought they were going off into freedom?"

"Yes, Miss Nancy, I hearn tell all 'bout dat. On'y I couldn't go 'long too. Dey was startin' for de lan' o' Canaan, an' was a-singin' Glory, halleluiah! but my eyes couldn't foller 'em. Dey was turn' back to whar yo' was sittin' in 'fliction an' de han' o' de Lo'd was heavy 'pon yo'. Der warn't no freedom fo' ole Aunt Monin so 'long her honey-chile was 'bidin' in de lan' o' sorrow an' trib'lation. If I had sot out on dat journey inter de wil'erness I couldn't have gone furder nor de clearin', 'cause my heart was stayin' behin' wid my chile."

It was impossible to doubt the sincerity of words spoken with such deep earnestness of manner, and Nancy looked at the old woman with a softened glance in her dark eyes. They were together in the small sitting room, not the big room where Overton had been shot, but in another one also opening off the veranda. Nancy habitually used this room now, for she could not bear the sight of that other one with its terrible memo-

ries. Feeling very lonely, she used to keep Aunt Monin with her all the time now, and she used to talk to her in a fitful sort of way, just as the ideas came into her head. It was during one of these disconnected talks that she suddenly asked the old woman one day how many children she had had.

"Real children of your own, Aunt Monin?" said Nancy, idly poking her needle in and out of her work without sewing at all.

"Seventeen, Miss Nancy. But dey warn't real chil-lun to me. Dey warn't so real as yo' mammy, dat was my fust, an' yo', dat was my las'. De black chillun warn't so real to me as de white," said Aunt Monin, looking with strange far-away glance out of the window, as if she was gazing at some one who was fading from her sight.

"Why weren't they real?" asked Nancy, amused at the answer, and not in the least understanding what Aunt Monin meant.

"'Cause dey all sole 'way South 'fore dey growed up. I didn't nebber see nary one o' them a'ter dey ole 'nough to peck roun' by se'f."

"Oh!" said Nancy in painful surprise, regretting that she had asked the question. "Then I suppose you were glad of me because I stayed; was that it, Aunt Monin?"

"De Lo'd give yo' ter me for ter save my soul from de sin o' dreadful wickedness. Yo' dunno what awful sin yo' save me from when yo' jess ten days ole an' no mo'," said Aunt Monin, with a voice hushed in awe and reverence.

Nancy was very much astonished and looked at her in silence for a moment or two.

"Tell me about it," she said at length.

"Better not, honey," answered the old woman, to Nancy's surprise.

"You must," said Nancy quickly, too unaccustomed to have a slave say No to bear it with equanimity, and Aunt Monin was too much accustomed to being a slave to refuse further.

"Yo' was jess bo'n, chile, an' I had my own little babby gal on'y month ole, when Mas'r John, yo' daddy, he done sell one o' his nigga women South 'long wid her chile to de dealer for to work on de plantation. She was call' Mander, an' she was a po' schreechin' critter, dre'ful cut up, when she hearn she was agwine ter leave her ole man an' her chillun. She cry an' she fret all de day long, so her babby get de cramp from de milk, what all turn p'ison, 'cause she fret so. An' de babby turn yaller, den green, an' die slap off. Den Mas'r John he come a-swearin' roun' an' tearin' ebery which way, 'cause he done promise to 'liver nigga woman an' chile to de dealer, an' he hain't got no chile to 'liver. Den de slave dealer he come 'long too, an' he swear roun' ebery which way, 'cause he hain't got no chile ter go 'long wid de woman. He tell Mas'r John he off wid de bargain' an' Mas'r John git mad, an' he come slap inter de kitchen an' take my little babby dat sleepin' in de crib an' he give it to Mander, an' she war carried off by de slave dealer 'fore I know dat my babby chile gone."

"Poor Aunt Monin!" said Nancy, gently stroking the old face that was quivering under the recollection of that tragedy of long ago. "And what did you do?"

"When I come back from de garden patch fetchin' de green corn fo' de white folks' dinna', I foun' de babby gone, an' de niggas tell me dat she gone South, sole right 'way from me. I was jess like de wolf in de wil'erness when de hunters done kill her cub. Dat babby war de las' o' seventeen, an' de missis she say I allers keep dat one fo' shu'. She war in bed an' didn't know nuffin 'bout de sellin'. I jess leapt inter de room whar she war lyin' with yo' by her side. She war drea'-

ful white an' skeery-lookin', on'y jess her eyes burnin' like coals outer de fire. I fall down on de floor an' tell her, an' I say dat de curse o' de Lo'd will fall on dish hyar house for de sin o' de father. An' I gone clean mad fo' de grief o' losin' my little babby."

"Aunt Monin was *this* the falling of the curse?" asked Nancy in an awe-struck whisper.

"Dis was de hand o' de Lo'd, chile, dat fall heavy on yer father. I was on'y po' mad nigga woman talkin' outer de wickedness o' my heart. De Lo'd 'buke me fo' my great sin, but de Lo'd done take nudder way to 'buke from what I guess he gwine ter. Sinfu' man can't go for to un'erstan' de ways o' de Lo'd."

"Tell me more. What did my poor mother say? She was sorry for you, wasn't she?" said Nancy very softly.

"So she was, chile. Her eyes dey got bigger an' bigger ebbry day, an' I 'lowed it was de tears she was cryin' dat made 'em so 'mazin' big an' shiny. She didn't git well. But I nebber took no notice, 'cause o' de blin'ness o' my sin an' rage. De rage kinder riz up in madness, an' I couldn't pray no mo'. I could on'y lie starin' wide-wake an' thinkin' o' de big carvin' knife what I has for ter kill de chuckins wid in de kitchen. Dat carvin' knife I see befo' my eyes in blood red, allers. I used to take an' hide it under de wood pile an' try forget whar I done put it. 'Twarn't no sort o' use. Jess as soon as I lie down 'side o' dat little empty crib I see de carvin' knife 'gain, an' de feelin' come inter my min' o' han's tryin' ter push me ter git it an' draw it 'cross mas'r's throat. Dey was de han's o' de debil dat was pushin' me, an' it was de father o' evil what was temptin' me to 'venge my babby by killin' ole mas'r what sold her South.

"One night it was dre'ful col' an' snowy, an' I wrestled wid de debil, an' call on de Lo'd to save me an'

keep me from murder. But de blood madness riz up an' blin' me. De voice o' de Lo'd die 'way. I on'y hear Satan temptin' me. I riz up an' was gwine for ter take dat carvin' knife when de do' opened an' a shinin' angel stan' on de do'step. I 'low it was de angel o' de Lo'd comin' to take me slap down inter hell for my sinfu' wicked thoughts. I drop down on my knees an' jess say, 'Lo'd, have mercy on de po' slave!' I couldn't say no mo' nor nudder word, for all de breath gone clean outer my body.

"Den I hear a silver-sweet voice say: 'Po' Aunt Monin, hyar is my babby chile, Nancy; I give her to yo' for yer own babby, 'stead o' de one I promise' yo' nebber to sell 'way from yo'. Take her, Aunt Monin, an' keep her always, an' love her jess like she was yer own little babby.' Den she lay de little white chile in my arms, an' it put its little mouth up an' suck at de po' nigga woman's breast. Den de madness go 'way from my eyes, an' I don't nebber see de carvin' knife no mo', on'y hear de silver-sweet voice o' de angel o' de Lo'd sayin': 'Take her, Aunt Monin, an' keep her an' love her, jess like yer own little babby.'"

Aunt Monin's voice sunk into a deep whisper. Nancy was sobbing softly.

"It was my poor mother came that night through the snow to comfort you."

"Chile, it was de angel o' de Lo'd. It wasn't no mortal woman pass through de snow dat winter night. She was shinin' bright an' jess as white as de snow itse'f when she stan' in de do' o' de sinfu' slave woman what she come to save. Dese eyes o' mine seen de glory o' de Lo'd on dat night, an' my ears has heard de voice o' de angel o' de Lo'd speakin' to me. She go straight up to heaven from de nigga woman's cabin. In de gray o' de mo'nin', 'fore de sun was up, dey foun' yo' po' mother dead, lyin' white an' still in her bed, an' de little

babby chile she done give ter me was warm an' cuddlin' close up to de po' slave woman's bosom. Dat was de way de Lo'd 'p'nted to 'venge my lost babby, Miss Nancy, an' nebber like de sinfu' wicked way I wanted ter 'venge it, by wicked murder dat 'ud sen' me inter ev'lastin' torment.

"When dish ole nigga woman die now, she's gwine ter heaven ter meet 'gain de angel o' de Lo'd, an' she hear 'gain dat silver-sweet voice speakin' to her once mo'. An' it say, 'Well done, Aunt Monin, thou good an' faithfu' servant!' I meet all my lost chillun an' live for evermo' an' rejoice in de Lo'd. De ways o' de Lo'd ain't de same as our po' sinfu' ways, Miss Nancy. Leave de vengeance ter him ter do it in his own good time."

Aunt Monin's story sunk deep into Nancy's heart. She was affected at the time by the old woman's pathetic tale and the thought of all that she must have suffered. But it was not a mere stirring of the surface of her feelings, an effect to disappear in a day. Instead of the dark, brooding desire for vengeance, there now came into her mind another thought, that of her poor young mother in the last hour of her life walking through the snow to comfort the sorrowing slave. Nancy did not regard this event from the scientific standpoint, as the case of a fever patient, who in her delirium slips away and hurries on her death during the careless sleep of the nurse supposed to be watching her. Some of Aunt Monin's religious and mystical fervour was imbibed by her foster child. The gift of the little white baby to replace the black one that had been so cruelly lost was an expiatory gift. And she, Nancy, was that child. She had been given by her dying mother to comfort a grief-stricken slave's heart. As she pondered over this, some of the spirit of that dead mother seemed to instil into her mind. She had never known

anything about her. Her father, who had been tenderly attached to his wife, couldn't bear to speak of her, and so Nancy had grown up without any mother influence at all. Her mother was not a memory, she was not even an imagined picture; she was nothing, she did not exist in her daughter's imagination at all. Now suddenly she appeared before Nancy's mental vision in this dramatic way—a shining angel of pity standing in the lowly negro cabin with her babe in her arms. How great must have been her love for the slaves, and how immense her desire to comfort and console, when she gave her only little free-born baby as a healing gift to the distracted slave mother!

As Nancy's mind dwelt on this image of her unknown mother some of the influences which had prompted the parent seemed now at work upon the daughter's mind. She had been given in expiation, she had been dedicated almost at birth to comfort the slave's heart. How had she fulfilled this high mission? Of course she loved Aunt Monin, because Aunt Monin was associated with all her childish memories of love and cuddling affection, but that was a mere every-day return for ordinary human love. Any other foster child who had a warm-hearted nature would have done the same. Was not her mission something higher and greater than this? A whole train of new thoughts and vague aspirations rushed into Nancy's mind by the door which Aunt Monin's story of her mother's last act had opened upon her. An army of generous emotions took possession of her and drove out that dark tribe of hate and vengeance which hitherto had entirely occupied her soul. The mother spirit, which had culminated in the offering up of her own child, now succeeded to the father spirit, which had hitherto dominated Nancy's mind and tended to make her a hard, uncompromising, and somewhat repellent young

woman. The softening, womanizing influence came over her soul, awakening new emotions, and resting with the divine touch upon her young nature. She would give herself to the work that had been begun by her mother's dying act. She would be the comfort of the slave. There was no cold debating of the rights and wrongs of the proposition; no weighing the disadvantages against the advantages of slavery. Nancy was not a creature of brain and calculation; she was a warm-hearted passionate girl, into whose life there had never come any crisis until that awful one of her father's death, which went near to turning the sweetness of her nature into bitterness and gall. But she was saved from being a bitter, hating woman by her dead mother, and by the same act, too, which had saved poor old Aunt Monin from the deadly sin of murder and bloody vengeance. Not by hate, but by love, is the world to be regenerated. The simple old negress out of the suffering of her life had learned this lesson, and was content to walk her road in earnest trustfulness. Slaves seldom feel the impulse to act. The most their life has taught them is to suffer uncomplainingly. A free person of generous emotions is not satisfied with this negative state, but tries to act in accordance with his best aspirations, and is not content to sit still with folded hands, if there is something he feels ought to be done. Nancy's nature was of this active creative kind. Her new enthusiasm was not content to limit itself to seeing that her negroes had enough to eat and were properly housed. Her quick imagination leaped forward to something greater and nobler than that mere brutish ideal.

They must be free.

It was characteristic of her hot impulsive nature that, having once reached this determination, all Nancy's thoughts and all her energies should be turned toward accomplishing the practical execution of the

scheme. It was not such an easy task as might be imagined by those who have never lived amid slavery. It was not sufficient for her to say to her bondsmen: "Be free. Ye are mine. I bestow freedom upon you." That would be a mere mockery of liberty so long as she let them remain in a slave State, where at any moment, by some whirligig of revised laws, they might be reduced again to slavery. She must take them away and start them in life under a free sky and on a free soil.

The new spirit working in Nancy did not remain without giving signs of itself and of the change that was going forward in her mind. About a month after her father's death there came the news that a Missouri raid had taken place in Kansas, in which some Free-soil men had been killed. Nancy felt none of the fierce satisfaction at this intelligence which would have been hers in the earlier and unregenerate days of her sorrow. She listened sadly to the account supplied by Mr. Oliver, a loquacious neighbour, who magnified the prowess of the Missourians. She made no comment. Then he told her how they had succeeded in recapturing some slaves who had been run off some months previously, and how these were brought back in triumph to their former masters.

When Nancy heard this her heart overflowed with the pity born of its new impulses.

"Oh, I am so sorry!" she said. "Poor creatures, how hard on them! And after they had been free for nearly a year! It was cruel."

"Wal, Miss Nancy," exclaimed the man, amazed at such language from the lips of a slave owner, "yer own niggers was run off, an' you had oughter be glad when the black cusses is cotched."

"I'm not glad. I'm sorry, very sorry, when any poor creature struggling for freedom is again captured."

Her cheeks flushed and her eyes flashed. Mr. Oliver looked at her admiringly through his narrow gray-green eyes, although he disapproved in a high degree of her dangerous sentiments.

"Wal, if them's yer 'pinions I guess yer'd better be makin' tracks for Kansas mighty peart. If yo' was a man, Miss Nancy, I 'low yo' wouldn't be let live long in this hyar country with them dog-gauned Free-soil idees."

"I am going to proclaim my opinions aloud where I like and when I like," said Nancy, who was human enough to have her views on the subject made quite clear to her mind by a little opposition. "I hate slavery. I hate all connected with slavery, and I have good reason to do so. If it hadn't been for slavery my father would have been alive and well to-day, and I shouldn't be alone in the world." Converts are proverbially keen for their faith, and Nancy spoke with all the zeal of a young convert.

"Wal, I swan!" exclaimed the man in dismay; "if yo' ain't gone an' turned ab'lishionist, right hyar in Missouri, too! Golly Ned!"

"If I had my way every slave should be free to-morrow," said Nancy with passionate recklessness.

"An' the country plumb ruined the next," said Mr. Oliver quickly.

"It will be worse ruined by slavery than by anything else, even a famine; that's what I think," said Nancy.

"Wal, I guess we'll kinder scoot 'long a while as we are," he replied with some contempt. "I'm powerful glad women hain't got no rights yet a while, Miss Nancy—by gosh, I am!"

"You are afraid we might set the slaves free," said Nancy with a flash of her black eyes.

The man turned to go and had ridden a few paces

down the road when he came back again and drew up close to where Nancy still was standing.

"Look hyar," he said with considerable sharpness of manner, "doan't you go now an' try an' come yer Yankee Free-soil bosh over the young men roun' hyar. They're jess plumb mad 'bout yer, an' would swaller any lies you handed 'em to eat. We men folks ain't a-goin' to have our boys primed up with Yankee lies. An' if you light out on that trail we'll 'scort yer out o' Missouri pretty all-fired quick, I can tell you."

His blood was up and he was angry, but then her blood was up too, and she was also angry. Moreover, she was a Missouri girl, and not the meekest of her sex in the State, either.

"I thank you for your threat, sir. Southern men often boast of their chivalry. I guess I'll remember this specimen of it. You threaten to hunt a girl out of the place where she was born just because of her opinions, and she an orphan with no one on earth to protect her! I guess I'll lay in a rifle for this winter, and I'll ask the first man I come across to teach me how to use it. Then I'll be ready for you Missouri gentlemen when you come along to hunt me out of house and home, just as if I was a wolf or a mad dog."

Mr. Oliver's sallow cheek took on a muddy sort of a blush as he slunk back from Nancy's biting words.

"You gals' tongues is 'bout as full o' p'ison as a copperhead, I reckon." He fairly turned tail and galloped off before Nancy could say anything more, so afraid was he of her stinging taunts.

Aunt Monin was standing within the shadow of the doorway, her black face shining with enjoyment.

"Lordy, Miss Nancy, it done me good on de inside for ter hear yo' talk to him. Guess he won't come roun' this er way for ter drive yo' out o' dish hyar house. Dar

ain't nary man in de whole county as aren't afeerd o' de tongue o' de pretty gal wid eyes as black as pear pips an' cheeks as red as roses. Dey run from de snap o' yo' eyes sooner dey would from de crack o' de Jay-Hawker's rifle."

CHAPTER IX

AUNT MONIN'S FREEDOM

NANCY had determined to free her negroes, and she set about it with characteristic energy and promptitude. Her encounter with her neighbour Mr. Oliver only served to hurry on her decision. It was the very next morning, when she and Aunt Monin were together in the little sitting room, that she unfolded her determination to the latter. Aunt Monin was working at a patch-work quilt of gorgeous colours, while she sat near the fireplace, where a couple of logs of mighty bulk were smouldering away in the lavish fashion known only on a timber farm that wanted clearing. The pale November sun crept disconsolately through the window pane and lay in ineffectual yellow patches upon the white boarded floor. It gave little heat, but indicated a friendly intention, so that the dog went and lay in the patch, preferring what he considered sun warmth derived from the outside to the baking heat of the glowing embers on the hearth. The cat preferred the fire heat, being of a feminine nature, pleased with warmth and not particularly addicted to the delights of outdoor life.

Nancy was there too, with some work on her lap, but she was not plying her needle. She was thinking, and occasionally she turned her glance from the fire to the wrinkled old face of the negress placidly intent on her work. Apart from the eyes, which are extremely full of life and expression, a negro's face does not indicate

the varying moods of the mind to the same extent as do the features of a white person. Their black faces become more akin to those of the lower animals, and one must see their eyes in order to read the face; just as one must see a dog's eyes in order to understand at all what is going forward in the canine mind. As Nancy looked at the old face she wondered whether the twin powers of suffering and of enjoyment were still alive in Aunt Monin—for they always reside together—or whether in the anguish of her younger days her finer feelings and capacities had been blunted and worn out. She seemed so content now, so peacefully happy, perhaps the day was passed when she could be stirred to great joy and delight in anything.

So Nancy looked and pondered, and Aunt Monin stitched her red and yellow and blue bits of stuff together to make her patchwork quilt.

“Aunt Monin,” said Nancy, going up to her and laying her hand on the shoulder upon which she had so often been carried when a baby, “what should you say if I gave you your freedom?”

Aunt Monin dropped her work, took a deep breath, but did not speak for a moment or two. Then she said:

“It would be de secon’ time de Lo’d show me ‘special marcy by yer han’, Miss Nancy. Yo’ bin de blessin’ o’ my life from de fust day yo’ born.”

Two great tears fell upon the patchwork quilt.

“Then, Aunt Monin, you shall be free,” said Nancy in a solemn voice, not without emotion.

“Glory, halleluiah!” cried the old woman, jumping to her feet and clapping her hands excitedly together. “My eyes has seen de glory o’ de comin’ o’ de Lo’d. I’se agwine ter be free! I’se agwine ter be free! Nebber be slave no mo’! Glory, halleluiah!”

She capered ecstatically about the room, winding herself up in her reel of cotton the while, until the

numerous threads began to entangle, and at length brought her to a standstill. Her great eyes were shining with tears. Nancy's speculations were fully and promptly answered; the power of deriving enjoyment was not dead in Aunt Monin. Never was a human being more full of it than was that old woman wildly dancing around the room, shouting and singing, with triumph and joy. When she stopped at last, wound up in her own thread, her young mistress went over to a small table under the window and wrote out what she flattered herself was a very legal document, beginning, "I, Nancy Overton, being sole owner of Aunt Monin, my slave, do hereby give and endow her with freedom." She signed and dated her paper and imagined she had done the thing in style. Of course, being unwitnessed, it was worth about as much as an old newspaper wrapper, but this Nancy didn't know.

"Here, Aunt Monin; take this. Now you are a free woman, as free as I am," said Nancy. .

Aunt Monin took the paper upside down and looked inquiringly at it.

"What dish hyar, Miss Nancy?" she asked.

"Your charter of freedom. I've set you free. You can go where you like and do what you like now," said Nancy, looking at her with shining eyes. She felt excited. It seemed a momentous crisis. She was beginning to pick up the task bequeathed to her by her mother, and to perform her part in the great work of her life.

"I'se free nigga an' can do what I like?" said Aunt Monin, desirous of having a perfectly correct idea of her new position.

"Yes. You are free. You can do what you like."

"Den I stay 'long o' yo' allers," said the old woman with emphasis, at the same time tossing the paper into the fire with the remark, "I ain't gwine ter stuff dat ar

paper inter my dress for ter get los' an' mixed up, so I can't fin' my thimble nohow."

Nancy looked at her with a gasp of surprise.

"I thought you wanted to be free," she said in a puzzled tone.

"I does so, my dressed lamb. I'se got mighty longin' ter be free, so I can allers stay 'long o' yo', chile."

"But then it won't make any difference if you stay with me just as you were before," said Nancy, at a loss to understand the old woman's position.

"No, honey-chile, der's heap o' differ'nce. Now I stay 'long o' yo' allers, 'cause I'se free nigga, an' I work for yo'; an' bimeby I min' yer little babbies for yo'. An' I live an' die happy ole woman, 'cause I'se free."

"And what's the difference between that and being my slave?" inquired Nancy with a smile.

"Heap sight differ'nce. When yo' marry, honey-chile, yer mas'r might want ter sell me South 'way from yo', an' yo' couldn't do nuffin for ter help me, jess as yo' po' mammy couldn't do nuffin for ter save my little babby girl. But now I'se free nigga, I stay 'long o' yo' allers, an' can't nebber be sole South."

Nancy's eyes filled with tears when she fully understood the train of reasoning which was actuating her old nurse.

"Are you quite sure you shall want to stay?" she said. "By and bye it may be different, and you will want to go away."

"No, no; Aunt Monin nebber go. Lordy, chile, po' ole Aunt Monin 'ud be lonely in heaven without her honey-chile was dar too."

She flung her arms around her foster child and kissed her passionately. Mother love could not be stronger than was the affection which bound Aunt Monin to the white fosterling who had been given to her to replace her own lost child.

Fully determined now upon her course of action, Nancy was sufficiently acquainted with the feeling of her neighbours to know that she must keep her plans to herself. If it once got abroad that she was going to set her negroes free, a storm would be raised that might very possibly result in driving her out of the country and them into deeper bondage down South. The great fever heat of the war was rising to the country's brain, and the patient was restless and turbulent. Nancy was already a suspected person, and she had to act with a degree of caution and secrecy very foreign to her nature and to her age. She did not dare talk over her project with any one, not even with Aunt Monin. If once the negress heard of what she intended, there was an end of secrecy. She must keep her own counsel until the last moment, and not let them know they were bound for Kansas until they were on the point of starting. Then she might dare tell them, for their own sense of personal implication in a dash for freedom would teach them to be quiet and not to jeopardize their chances by premature boasting. But until that moment arrived she must keep her plans to herself.

Another reason why Nancy wished to leave the country was the fact that James Harte was still in it. Of all her admirers he was the most persistent and the one she found it hardest to deal with. He was a fierce-tempered, wild young fellow whom every one dreaded, and one whom she emphatically wished to keep at arm's length, and he was just the one who pushed himself into her life whether she would or no. He was brave to recklessness, with that courage which has given an evil reputation to the men who first peopled the new territories. He was a law unto himself, and he enforced his law by his personal courage. Nancy was a courageous girl, but she sometimes felt fairly afraid of James Harte. She knew the day would come when he would ask her to

be his wife. She knew also that she would refuse him, and her heart beat with apprehension to think what might follow then. He had not in so many words declared himself yet, but he had done so in deeds, and Nancy could not possibly remain blind to the motives which brought him so frequently to her lonely house. He had constituted himself her protector, as it were, and used to look in at all times of the day just to see if she was safe, he said. He was genuinely in love with her, and was also very uneasy about the defenceless position in which she now found herself.

“Nancy, you hadn’t ought to stay here alone. It isn’t safe,” he said one day, not for the first time by any means.

“I don’t think any harm will come to me,” she replied, with an apparent confidence that was not altogether consistent with the state of her mind, and was certainly not justified by the state of the country.

“Just fancy now, if another of those Jay-Hawk raids should come this way. You can never know when they’ll come, nor where they’ll strike.”

“I should free my slaves at once and welcome,” said Nancy with some exultation. “The Jay-Hawkers wouldn’t attack defenceless women.”

“Jay-Hawkers are no better than regular bush-whackers, and downright scoundrels too,” said Harte in reply. “I shouldn’t think you needed to be reminded that they do sometimes attack defenceless people.”

“That was a wicked man,” said Nancy in sudden agitation. For all her new enthusiasm in the slaves she had not advanced far enough to be able to forgive her father’s murderer. “I’ll never believe that he came only to free the slaves.”

“Would you know him again if you saw him?” asked Harte.

"Yes, I think I should. I feel sure that I would have some instinctive aversion toward him, and that something would tell me if he ever was to come near me," replied Nancy. "I hope I never shall meet him, for I don't like to think what I might be led to do."

"Well, I should like to meet him," muttered the young man. "I shouldn't have any doubts as to what I should do. Now, as near as you can remember, what was he like?"

"He was tall."

"And dark?"

"I think so, but I don't feel sure. There was not much light in the room, and I didn't look at him. It was all so fearfully quick, and afterward the room was full of smoke."

"Had he any mustache?"

"I feel sure not. I think I remember noticing his mouth when he first spoke," said Nancy, with manifest reluctance. It was a deeply painful subject to her, and one about which she never spoke unless absolutely compelled to do so. The feeling that perhaps, after all, it was the falling of the curse, and that her father's death was in some measure expiatory, made her all the more anxious never to bring the subject before the minds of other people.

"There was a coon out there in that dispute we had at the Osage Fork," continued Harte, "I guessed he was the man, and I sighted on him three times; but every time I got the drop on him some cuss came between and spoiled my aim. I wasn't sure I ever hit him at all."

"I am glad you did not," said Nancy in reply to this communication.

"What! and he might be your father's murderer!" exclaimed Harte.

"Then you see he might have been quite another

man. I have a horror of this sort of killing going on—men avenging crimes on the wrong people, and it going on and on until we are in a regular war, with neighbours killing one another. Oh, it is a horrible thought!" said Nancy with a shudder. She could not speak to Harte or to any other person about that feeling in regard to her father's death which was growing upon her, and which was not so much the result of thought as of a morbid imagination.

"Folks are talking a lot about war round here now," remarked her visitor. "They're saying 'tis got to come to that pretty soon now. The South ain't going to stand Lincoln's election as easy as some folks think."

"Then it will be the vengeance of the Lord for the sin of slavery," said Nancy.

"Bosh!" said Harte vigorously.

"Aunt Monin often says the time is coming near when we shall see signs and wonders."

"Land o' Goshen, Nancy, you ain't going to listen to the stuff an old nigger woman tells you!" exclaimed Harte, with sturdy masculine incredulity. "Niggers have been always hollering round and calling on the name of the Lord and so forth. It seems to comfort them in a way."

"Sometimes the ignorant see what the wise are too blind to perceive," said Nancy in a low voice, following rather the train of her own ideas than the course of Harte's reasoning.

"Look here, Nancy, I'll tell you just what it is: you are nervous, and low-spirited, and sad. No wonder, after all you've suffered, and living by yourself, too," said Harte in quick, uneasy sentences, while his voice would quiver in spite of all he could do. "Don't you think that it is time you had some one beside you in case of need? You know all along I've been loving you, Nancy, and that you've only got to raise your eye-

lid and wink a Yes, and I'd have been down on my knees and grateful. You don't care for my love one bit; I can see that, you never did, but maybe you'd be glad some day to have a man to protect you. I guess I'm about the best shot in this county anyhow, and there ain't a man between here and Fort Leavenworth I'd be afraid to stand up against. Do you care about that, Nancy?"

This was possibly an appropriate form in which to cast a declaration of love on the Missouri border, but Nancy could hardly repress a smile as she answered:

"I know you are a brave man, James, and no woman could want a braver; but I'm not in a mind to marry."

"But think what would become of you here! You absolutely can't live here, slap on the border almost, without a man to draw a trigger for you," urged the young man with vehemence.

"Perhaps I shall go away."

"What for?" exclaimed he in dismay, not at all relishing this way out of the dilemma. "You were born and reared here. Why should you wish to go away?"

"Why not? Folks are always moving. I should like to go somewhere else, I think."

"I couldn't bear to think of it. You mustn't, Nancy," said Harte anxiously.

"Mr. Oliver said if I didn't change my opinions the men would come and turn me out of the country," said Nancy very unguardedly.

"Damn them, let them try it!" exclaimed Harte, furiously; "I'll shoot every man jack of them, beginning with Oliver."

Nancy sprang startled to her feet.

"How dare you make such a threat!" she asked indignantly. "It is this wicked, wicked taking of life

that is going to bring a curse down upon our land. You think it is nothing to kill a man!"

"There ain't nothing else for it, oftentimes," answered Harte, with unaffected Western philosophy.

"I don't think it is ever the thing to do," replied Nancy, with an earnestness derived from her personal experience rather than from any careful course of reasoning.

"I'll do whatever you say, if only you'll marry me," said the young man, with the promissory lavishness habitual with one suffering from the passion of love. "You can make me what you will. If you'll marry me, I'll settle down and work a farm, and won't sight a gun on anything with two legs excepting buzzards. If you won't, I'll turn bushwhacker, by thunder, and raid Kansas as long as I can level a rifle."

"Is this a threat, Mr. Harte?" asked Nancy stiffly.

"You girls would drive a man clean crazy with your tormenting ways. Then, when he don't know what he is saying, you turn on him like that," said Harte, trying to bring his furious temper under control.

"I don't think I ever acted unkindly to you," said Nancy, not without some show of feeling.

"No, you never did. You were always the nicest girl I ever saw or heard of, but can't you understand? I want you to marry me," he ended, lamely enough, but with a good deal of pathos nevertheless.

"No, James, I can't," she said as gently as she could, and yet with unmistakable firmness.

"Won't you change? Girls often do," said he, looking at her longingly.

"No, I sha'n't change. That is my answer. Try and forget it all, and you will meet some other woman that you will love better," she added, with the usual futile attempt at consolation which women offer under these circumstances. Fortunately she did not volun-

teer to be a sister to him. Harte's wild temper broke out at what he could not fail to see was a final answer.

"Then I don't care what I do. I'll go straight to the devil, and you'll have the satisfaction of knowing it is all through your doing," said he savagely.

"Then you would have gone all the same, no matter what had been my answer," replied Nancy, her melting mood quite dispelled by his wild words, and her temper rising too.

"You could have made a good man of me if you had tried; now you'll see what you've done," said he as he left the room. He flung himself upon his horse and rode furiously away, leaving the young girl half frightened and wholly angry. A man had no right, she argued to herself, to try and terrify a woman into marrying him. Any man who could do such a thing would be quite certain to show his violent temper to her as soon as she was his wife.

Harte, of course, came no more to the farm to see if Nancy were safe, and nobody else took his place of volunteer protector, for he had, as it were, driven off all her other suitors by the persistence of his wooing. It was very generally known that he was a man that would brook no interference from anybody—an attitude of mind which, when backed by the newest rifle and the steadiest hand in the county, was apt to create a feeling of deference in the minds of onlookers. The complete isolation in which Nancy now found herself only increased her anxiety to be gone out of the country. She was completely out of harmony with everything around her, and she did not feel that her position was one that could long be retained with safety. Accordingly, she sold her farm to her nearest neighbour, who was none other than the Mr. Oliver who had been the first to threaten her with the wrath of the surrounding slave-holders. He felt some slight qualms of conscience at

having, as it were, frightened her out of the country and then at reaping the benefits of her going; but this did not prevent him from buying her farm at considerably less than its real value and urging her to accept the offer, because nobody was likely to bid anything for it, so he told her. Nancy closed the bargain with him and believed what he said until two other men offered her better terms, when, however, it was too late for her to accept them.

There was a dreary auction at the old house the second week of the New Year, when all the neighbours came and ransacked the place, and the auctioneer cracked jokes, as it is his class privilege to do, offering old pots with holes in them to anxious housewives, and recommending them highly for their fascinating capabilities of letting the water run off the beans without the trouble of taking up the lid and emptying the pot.

There is nothing so dreary as an empty house after an auction has cleared away everything that had made the four walls look friendly and homelike. The bareness and discomfort of everything combined with the half-lost sense of familiarity are doubly painful. The rooms are empty and re-echo to our loitering steps with harsh coldness; the passages are full of wailing draughts that seem to mock our mourning with their long-drawn sighs. Visions of past hours of pleasure and ease rise suddenly before us with startling clearness, peopling the empty spaces with the vanished forms of friends who will never again occupy the familiar places. The genial fireplace, where the lightwood used to leap up in glinting flames amid a storm of sparks, is cold and black, frowning at us with its sullen overhanging mantelpiece. The home is dead, leaving only the corpse of the house behind to remind the sorrower of happier days. We look sadly upon the corpse and think with aching hearts of how fair the home had been.

It was Nancy's own wish to leave her native State and to begin life anew in Kansas, but when the actuality of her wish was ripe for accomplishment she was full of grief and despair. She had lived all her life in that home, and although America is too new a world for its children to have taken very firm hold of it with the tendrils of their affections, still, even there, people, if not bitten by the mania of moving, do feel a warm attachment to the scenes of their childhood. The poor girl sat on a heap of cornshucks in the dismantled sitting room and wept bitterly.

"Honey-chile, de wagons is all ready, an' de chillun is wrap up in de warm quilts an' de buffalo robes, an' dey is all dar waitin' ter set out. Come 'long, chile, we mus' be gwine."

"O Aunt Monin," sobbed Nancy, "my heart is broken. I haven't got any home left, and nobody to care for me in this wide, wide world."

"Chile, de Lo'd's lookin' down 'pon yo' dish bressed minute, an' we's all gwine ter set out for de promise' lan'."

Aunt Monin was radiant with joy and tried to start a chorus of Glory, halleluiah! but none of the other negroes responded. They remembered that other setting out for the River Jordan when they had lifted up their voices and sung; and they remembered, too, what had befallen them on that fearsome journey toward the promised land. So they were mute now when Nancy climbed into the foremost wagon and gave the signal for the departure. A little caravan of three canvas-covered wagons left the farm and disappeared down the road through the bare trees. At the fork the young girl looked out for one last sight of the home where she had passed all her life, but her eyes were blinded with tears, and she did not see the house, only a blurred shape bewilderingly glancing beyond the leafless trees.

Shortly afterward they met a man with a rifle on his shoulder, walking down the road in an absent-minded way. He did not seem to notice the wagons, but walked on until he was almost under the noses of the horses.

“Jah, mas'r, won't yer give us room?” called the driver of the first wagon, and the voice seemed to startle the absent-minded pedestrian. He looked up like one bewildered, and, realizing that he was in the very middle of the road, stepped to one side until the wagons had passed. Then he again went forward, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left, but walking like one in a dream, until he too came to the fork. Then he awoke with a start and gazed along the road at the deserted house, as if he expected some fearful object to rush out and confront him. But what fearful object could come out of an utterly deserted house, unless it was a fearful memory?

And so the stranger stood gazing as he leaned on his rifle, while the wagons crept farther and farther away on their journey toward the land of the free.

CHAPTER X

A SUSPECT

THE recollection of that sunny afternoon in October rose up so clearly in Heaton's mind as he stood gazing at the house where he had learned his first lesson in Jay-Hawking that he was almost unable to shake off the feeling that this was a part of the same terrible day. He looked at the bare trees to prove to himself that a long time had elapsed since he was here before. Then they had been in all the glory of autumn tints, gold and crimson—at least, in the morning he had thought they were golden yellow, but afterward they all became crimson and blood red—now the trees were bare and the brown earth was dull and scentless, wrapped in winter slumber. The sounds and voices of the woods were stilled. No wee chattering creatures in fur or feather fluttered among the branches or pecked at the tree trunks. Everything was as still as death. Even the house before him looked silent and deathlike as the young man walked slowly toward it. There was no sound either of man or animal as he reached the bars, and his footfall upon the veranda re-echoed loudly in his ears. He knocked at the door, but no one answered. He raised the latch and looked in. The room was bare and comfortless, not a sign of life anywhere. Heaton stepped into it, and then in a flash he felt, rather than saw, that this was the room where he had stood last autumn. There had sat the man in his rocking-chair,

and there he had fallen as Heaton had fired his fatal shot. He took a step forward and saw on the floor a dull red-brown stain. He knew too well what that must be—that doleful stain that can never be washed out of boards, but sinks in and lasts for years to mark the spot where life blood has been shed.

“Like the stain on my heart,” said the young man to himself as he hurriedly left the room, closing the door after him. He sat down on the first step of the veranda, and let his head fall wearily on his hand. He experienced a dull sense of disappointment. He had come here upon a foolish, ill-defined errand, not knowing exactly why he came, but from an irresistible desire to see again that poor girl and understand quite clearly what had become of her. This was the house, he knew that well enough, but the people were all fled, and he would now never know anything about her. Her wailing cry would then always ring in his ears as the only sound her voice was capable of producing.

“Hullo, stranger! Reckon yer hain’t got much comfort out o’ that house, anyhow.”

Heaton started. He had not noticed the approach of a man, who now stood leaning against the bars.

“No, indeed, I haven’t,” he replied with considerable earnestness, for the words were so unexpectedly true and applicable to himself.

“No, siree; it’s plumb lonesome, you bet.”

“What has become of the people who lived here?”

“Know ‘em?” inquired the man, looking keenly at him.

“No,” said Heaton, beginning to rouse up.

“What yer come hyar for, then?” was the next inquiry, very suspiciously delivered.

“I am starting on a hunt, and I thought I’d stay over the night here, if there had been any one in the

house," said Heaton, rapidly perceiving that his interlocutor was looking askance at him.

"Seed ary head o' game?"

"Not yet. Is there much about this neighbourhood?"

"What kind was yer 'lowin' ter track?"

"Deer," replied the young man.

"No, there ain't no *deer*," was the reply, with a strong emphasis on the word.

"Or wolves?" said Heaton, hoping he was not mentioning game that betrayed too great an ignorance of the locality.

"No, there ain't no *wolves*," came the answer, with the same curious emphasis which Heaton had already noticed.

"Well, is there any game worth while?"

"Yaas, we hev hed pretty tole'ble game roun' hyar sometimes," replied the man at the bars with a most exasperating drawl.

"What do you hunt, then?" inquired Heaton, with some irritation at the unsatisfactory nature of the replies he had hitherto extracted from his enigmatical questioner.

"Jay-Hawkers!" said he with sudden fierceness; and then he closed his keen eyes until they were mere slits, out of which he could survey an enemy safely as through narrow loopholes.

Heaton felt that the situation was becoming critical, and that it might need all his skill to extricate himself from a dilemma which had ugly possibilities about it.

"I suppose this part of the country is pretty quiet. You don't have any trouble here, do you?" he observed, with a fine assumption of carelessness.

"We're 'lowing we'll keep it pretty quiet, you can lay on that," was the ready answer.

"This ain't very far from Mine Creek, is it?" next

inquired the young man, with a view to leading the conversation into perfectly safe lines. He was not as successful as he could have wished, for the next question he had to meet was:

“Be yer goin’ inter Kansas?”

“Not at present. I wanted to get the bearings of the country, being a stranger here.”

“That’s a Sharpe’s carbine you’ve got thar. Kansas men has ‘em mostly.”

“Ah, this gun,” observed Heaton, rising from the step and preparing to walk up to the man with casual interest. “You’ve got a smooth-bore, I see.”

“Stan’ back thar whar you are, stranger. Don’t yer come nary step nigher. I don’t ‘low ary pusson ter git the draw on me, an’ you’re jess ‘bout my best shootin’ range now.”

“Oh, very well,” said Heaton contemptuously. “I only wanted to show you my rifle, if you cared to see it.”

“That mought be, stranger. I ain’t agoin’ ter say you ain’t all on the square, but this hoss don’t let nary man come nigher than he can fix him handy.”

Heaton backed slowly to his position on the steps of the veranda and sat down again with his rifle laid on his knees. He kept his eyes fixed upon the face of the man at the bars, and a scornful smile lurked around his bearded mouth. Keeping his eye also on Heaton, the suspicious Missourian sidled off until out of range, when he briskly walked out of sight among the trees.

“Precious country this!” thought the young man to himself as he watched this cautious retreat, and then he remembered with a shudder that he had done all that one man could to add to the feeling of dread and suspicion with which a Missourian would naturally view a stranger that might possibly hail from Kansas.

“I swear before Heaven I’ll never do another act which will help to embitter the feeling between my

fellow-countrymen; but if by shedding my blood I can deliver my land from the curse of slavery then to the last drop I'll give it!"

That was Charlie Heaton's vow as he stood in the silent porch of Nancy Overton's abandoned home.

He was never then going to see this girl whose voice haunted him. He could never make reparation in any tangible way to her, as he had half hoped might be possible when he set out on his trip, but he could make vicarious atonement in some other way. The fading of his fanciful dream gave the young man a sense of desolation. He did not realize until the dream had faded how much his imagination had been alluring him with the idea of doing something to obtain forgiveness from the one whom he had most injured. Sitting on the step of the abandoned house, he realized all at once how utterly foolish had been his imaginings. The severe practical spirit of his upbringing reasserted itself, and he gave over being a fanciful vapouring youth. Now, indeed, that the dream no longer impeded his vision, he perceived into what a serious position it had been the means of leading him. He was actually carrying his life in his hand. He now plainly perceived that his Kansas get-up was recognised by the Missourians, and he had run into this danger for what? He knew when setting out that it was an expedition that would not commend itself to the entirely practical common-sense person, but now he stood revealed to himself as a very tolerable specimen of an idiot on account of what he had done. Charlie Heaton therefore came to his senses on the steps of Nancy's house, and resolved to behave like a reasonable being for the future, and to put vague fancies out of his mind.

The first result of this reawakening of the Vermont side of his character was the determination to get himself out of Missouri as quickly and as safely as he could,

and for this purpose he resolved to be exceedingly cautious. Accordingly he shouldered his rifle and started homeward, deciding to make for Mine Creek with all expedition. Just before nightfall he met a couple of horsemen who, upon nearer observation, proved to be wearing the United States uniform. They stopped him at once, and he heard, to his great relief, by the first words that they uttered, that he had to deal with educated men and officers. They questioned him narrowly as to where he had come from, and pricked up their ears when he said from Kansas.

“How many men has Montgomery out with him in his army?”

“Montgomery has no army at all,” said Heaton, much astonished at the question.

“We have information that he has assembled a large force,” said the senior officer.

“That information is very incorrect,” returned the young man with a smile. “I was speaking to Montgomery not a week ago, and he had not a single man with him then, but was just getting along with his farm work like any other settler.”

“He might have got them together since you saw him.”

“Hardly; settlers are not so thick around the Big Sugar district,” said Heaton, remembering the episode of Athens, London, and Oak City.

“They had a big raid last fall, when a hundred men turned out and ran off a lot of negroes and killed a number of Missourians,” remarked the senior officer.

Heaton remained discreetly silent, not considering it wise to set him right on the many points where his information was hopelessly incorrect.

“That’s an army knapsack you’ve got. Were you ever a soldier?” asked the younger officer, speaking for the first time.

"No; I bought it from a man in Lawrence," said Heaton in reply.

"Ah, I knew you were a free-state man. Now take a piece of advice from one who knows something about these parts of the world. Clear out of Kansas unless you want to be mixed up in the ugliest border war you ever dreamed of. We're pretty near into it now, and I can tell you these Missouri men are devils when their blood is up, and you Kansas fellows are every whit as bad. This isn't going to be a good spot for quiet, respectable people during the next couple of years. You may bet on that."

"I dare say you are right in all probability," remarked Heaton. "I shouldn't wonder if I acted upon the advice in a sort of a way. I'm thinking of going on a buffalo hunt out toward Salina."

"A very good plan," said the officer genially. "I'd have you follow it out. And here's a hint for you till you get safe among your buffaloes. Don't go near any house if you can possibly help it, for as likely as not you'll be shot from behind your back if you do. Safe out of Missouri and good luck to you!"

When Heaton came to the crossing of Mine Creek he saw that the waters, though by no means so high as on that day when they fought and lost the battle beside the river, were high enough to stop a man on foot. Anxious as he was to get across, there was nothing for it but to wait until some wagon came by which would ferry him over. Luck favoured him; a wagon came lumbering along, and a man hailed him from under the cover.

"Hullo, stranger! Is the river too deep to cross?"

"I was just wondering about it myself," answered Heaton.

The individual who had first spoken disappeared inside his wagon, and Heaton began to wonder if he was

going to shoot him from behind that place of concealment. He was prepared for anything now in Missouri. After a moment's suspense there appeared from the tail of the wagon a wild-looking child, half boy, half girl, who clambered nimbly down by the feed box and began rapidly to unhitch the larger of the two horses, a big brown mare, who knew her well apparently, since she rubbed her nose confidentially upon the child's bare head. With the utmost speed and without a particle of fear the small person had the mare free of the wagon in a trice, when, standing upon the pole, she stripped off the harness from over the animal's tail with a most professional twirl. Heaton had watched her proceedings with some amusement, wondering how she could possibly get the hames and collar off so big a horse. The child, however, was not at a loss as to how to proceed. She first unbuckled the underneath strap, and then, putting her foot on the knee of the mare and twining her two vigorous hands in its mane, she literally swung herself on its back, astride, of course. From this point of vantage she slung the unbuckled harness clear of the animal's feet and remained herself seated barebacked in triumph upon the unharnessed mare.

"Well done!" exclaimed Heaton admiringly; "I never saw a horse unharnessed in finer style."

The child smiled with gratification.

"The mare ain't no trouble; I can always manage her. He's the bother to harness," pointing to the other horse, who was still hitched to the wagon.

"Why?"

"'Cause he steps away when I want to put the housing on his back, and then I fall down with it and tangle up."

At this moment the child's father emerged from the interior of the wagon, having divested himself of all his heavy clothes, and coming forth clad only in shirt and

trousers. Without a word he took the little girl's place on the big mare and rode straight into the water. She, meanwhile watching with the keenest interest, placed herself beside Heaton and made intelligent comments upon the proceedings.

"The creek's powerful high, ain't it?"

"Yes, it is a bad crossing."

"Guess pap'll do it an' git 'cross on Brown Bess. She's mighty cute at swimmin'."

"But see, she's stopped."

"Oh, that ain't nothin'. Brown Bess is on'y jess smellin' how deep it is. Hark how she blows an' spouts!"

The mare was indeed blowing loudly at the water, which was over the rider's bare feet and was getting deeper at every step she took. Very slowly they waded across; once only the mare went down into a hole, and the rider got something of a ducking.

"Land," exclaimed the child, who at once seemed to grasp the situation in all its bearings, "if ther ain't a hole plumb in the crossin'! Guess we ain't goin' to get over to-night."

But she had miscalculated the cuteness both of Brown Bess and her rider, who were carefully outlining that hole by means of their feet. When its dimensions were made clear to the man, he and his horse came dripping back again to where the wagon stood.

"Can we cross, Washington?" asked a voice from the interior of the wagon, and for the first time Heaton became aware that there was a woman inside.

"We'll try, wifie," said the rider of the wet horse.

Heaton came forward and offered to help in any way that he could, and in return asked for a seat over the ford. The man eyed him with misgiving, especially the rifle and pistols, which were the most evident articles of Heaton's equipment.

"Well, stranger, I'm a man of peace; a nonresistant by conviction, and I don't know as I should be exactly justified in carrying so many weapons of offence into Kansas, where, as I'm told, there are already too many." He spake with a certain sing-song cadence, as if he was in the habit of speaking a good deal at meeting with his eyes shut.

"You needn't be alarmed," said Heaton, suppressing a smile with some difficulty; "my warlike arms are not intended for the slaughter of anything more terrible than a few buffaloes for food."

"Stranger, I don't know as it would be possible to put firearms to a worse use. I can't think of a greater waste, and a wickeder waste, than killing innocent creatures in order to poison human beings," said he with fervour.

"I'm not going to poison anybody," answered Heaton with amazement. "I am only going to get food for myself."

"Buffalo meat is poison, deadly poison. I'm a vegetarian by conviction," returned the man impressively.

"Oh!" said Heaton with feebleness, but he really did not know what else to say.

"Yes, I am, and I think for human beings to eat dead corpses—"

"Washington, are you going to cross or are you not?" called a sharp voice from the inside.

"Yes, yes, to be sure. Stranger, just lend a hand to help hoist up this load, would you? I've got a few planks, and we can put them across the body of the wagon, and then we'll put the women's truck on top of them to keep dry."

Washington spoke sharply and quickly, very much to the purpose, moreover, as if he had roused up from the meeting with shut eyes, and had opened them to become a thoroughly practical man, unbothered by con-

victions of any sort. The planks were rapidly made into a kind of platform, upon which was reared a pyramid of "women's truck" which could not stand water, such as sugar, flour, rice, etc. This being fastened down, was to be held in position by Heaton, and they were ready for the great effort.

There was first a fierce downward plunge through the gully that cut the steep mud banks, before they reached the water at all. The reins were already being tightened in Washington's grasp, the whip was raised, when Heaton suddenly called out:

"Where's the child? She isn't in the wagon."

"She's putting on the drag to the hind wheel. Gee up, Bess! Now, then! Easy! Whoa! Easy! Easy, now!"

The wagon lurched, pitched, rushed down the steep, slippery gully, stopped for one second at the edge of the water, when Heaton heard the sharp rattle of the drag chain, then into the water with them. The little girl was nowhere to be seen, but Heaton had all he could do to keep his load steady, and had no spare attention to bestow on her for the moment. The water rose in the body of the wagon, and he realized that he was standing in exceedingly cold water. The vehicle creaked and the horses snorted loudly, the waters swirled by. The driver stood up and yelled to his animals.

"Lord a mussy," said the wife, "my bag o' flour 'ull be wet, and it's the very best whites!"

The water remained stationary; they swayed gently along, cleared safely that hole in the middle, and at length began to emerge from the creek.

"Now, then, go it! Bess, Bill! Geeup! Hisk now, gerree!"

You could hear the horses as they strained at the collar. They were struggling up the companion gully at the other side out of the river. You could hear their

muscles almost crack with the tension, and there was the child whooping and screeching at them, dancing in an ecstasy of excitement under their very noses, as they laboured valiantly through the sticky mud. At length they stood on the top, panting, trembling in every limb, and the driver jumped down to see if anything had been smashed in the struggle, and Heaton jumped down too to ask the little girl how she had got over.

“In the feed box, behind there,” she answered, pointing to a small trough fastened to the rear of the wagon; “I hopped in just at the minute I took the drag off, when the hind wheel was running into the water.” The mother felt her bag of “best whites,” and finding even the bottom untouched by water gave a sigh of relief.

“I shall have my sody biscuits, after all,” she remarked with a smack of her thin lips.

“Ugly, ain’t it?” said Washington, feeling his horses’ legs carefully one by one; “kills the critters, that sort o’ work.”

“Very hard on them indeed,” replied Heaton; “but you did it in fine style. Thank you for the ferry. I don’t know how I should have got across without your help.”

“You’re welcome, stranger. Goin’ far?”

“I’ve got a cabin at Keokuk. I must get there some time.”

“Afoot?”

“Yes; I’m walking.”

“Our house ain’t far off, if you’d like to break your journey.—Eh, wife?”

“Of course,” said the wife, cordially re-echoing her husband’s invitation; “and I’ll have some sody biscuits to-night, the minute we get home.”

“Thank you; I’ll accept with pleasure,” answered Heaton, to whom this hospitality was doubly welcome,

since he was far from home, and had not a notion where he should otherwise have spent the night.

“Mam’s sody biscuits is jess plumb,” said the child, sitting down beside him and gathering up the reins in her small brown hands, while her father dived into the wagon to put on again the warm clothes which he had thrown off for the anxious and difficult effort of the crossing of Mine Creek.

Resisting very earnest appeals to become a vegetarian and to settle down on the next quarter section and help them spread their principles, Heaton left his kind hosts after a couple of days and returned home in order to make preparations for his buffalo hunt. Besides being an exciting adventure, the trip was going to be a profitable one as well. Food was scarce in Kansas, owing to the drought of the preceding summer. It was called a “famine” in excitable newspaper articles, but fortunately people in Kansas did not know what a real famine was, and so gave that name of terrible significance to the scarcity of food which had begun to make itself felt.

A strong young fellow, who was a capital shot, could not better employ his strength and skill than in hunting to obtain food which he could easily sell at good prices. Accordingly, soon after that mad expedition into Missouri, Heaton closed the door of his cabin at Keokuk, and went up to Lawrence. His plan was to join with a young fellow of his acquaintance, John P. Ridgway, to provide themselves with a couple of teams, and to start for the plains as soon as possible. Salina was their ultimate destination, a place as its name indicates, on the edge of that great alkali region where Nature had taken heed, by impregnating the water with poisonous salts, to keep man at bay, at any rate, for some time. The buffaloes like to browse on such plains, for the salt licks, as they are called, form inexhaustible spots of de-

light to them, while if they take care to have a running river within measurable distance of their feeding grounds they can bid defiance to thirst.

One journey across the dull, monotonous prairie is very like another. There is the early start in the gray starlight of the winter's morning, when the horses' bits are so cold that the animals rear when they are being forced into their mouths and one's fingers are so numb that buckles and straps become endowed with a miraculous power of not fitting into each other. There is the cold choking breakfast of corn bread and dried beef, almost as hard to chew as a feed of oats, after which there is a stiff climb into the driving seat. Hard, unyielding buffalo robes are drawn about one's frozen feet, and stiffened half-dried gloves are pulled over one's awkward fingers; these exhaust the possible comforts of the heedful driver. A swear or two, and the journey begins just as the chill sun comes winking over a frosty horizon. Then comes a long morning of endless rolling prairie, trotted over if the load be light and the horses strong and well fed, crawled over with a full wagon or a weak team. This puts one to sleep, bobbing and nodding over the reins. There is no interest, no excitement, no nothing. There is not even a ditch to fall into. No, nor a stone or a bush that the horses might shy at, if the poor brutes' faculty for shying had not been worn out of them years before by hard work.

There is nothing but brownish yellow dry grass for miles and miles in all directions, with a wriggling thread of a road creeping along among its mounds and rolling slopes—a mere track, scarce to be distinguished from no track, but laid down on maps and spoken of by prospective settlers and boasting land agents as (in this case) the great Santa Fé road.

There is the midday halt, a time of relaxation for man and beast in a long winter's journey. The sun has

warmed the world. Fingers, buffalo robes, and straps and buckles are limber once more and have become workable. The corn bread and dried beef choke less emphatically than in the morning. There is perchance milk to drink with it, if a settler's house has been lately passed, and there is a good long stretch to be enjoyed in the yellow grass. The horses munch their corn gratefully and go to sleep standing, their great heads dropping lower and lower, until their noses bump against the hub of the hind wheel, when they awake with a start and a rattle of their harness that arouses the sleepy drivers in the grass. Then there is the long afternoon, the counterpart of the morning, with the pleasant prospect of the dinner halt left out, to be ended after dusk by the night's camp. A hot supper and a fire for your feet are the great luxuries of camping out, tempered by smoky food and blisters on your fingers from handling burning sticks. One hour of perhaps perfect enjoyment is now relished as the drivers sit round the fire and smoke their well-earned pipes. This is the time for good stories and pleasant talk. If there is an absence of wind and snow and rain, coupled with the bodily presence of plenty of brushwood and sticks, a good fire may be built and a comfortable night may be passed by tired teamsters with their toes to the fire and their noses under buffalo robes. After the night comes the morning with its repetition of darkness, cold, and the dismal work of getting under way before sunup.

Heaton and his chum were good hands at camping, the former because he was a healthy young fellow who did not mind roughing it, the latter because he was an old hand at it, and knew how to extract the greatest possible comfort out of the most unpromising circumstances. He could select a good camping out place with unerring judgment, and make a warm dry bed for

himself if there was an armful of prairie grass to be got anywhere round. Heaton enjoyed the wildness and novelty of it all, but his friend Ridgway, as soon as he had provided for his immediate comfort, used to think of nothing but of how much money he could make by selling the meat they were going to get.

The air was full of rumours of war. South Carolina had seceded, and newspapers printed in Charleston used to head items from Washington as, "News from Abroad." Men did not know clearly what was before the nation, but the blindest could not fail to perceive that a crisis was approaching which would decide a people's destiny. Around their camp fire at night the two young men had many a discussion about the probable course of events.

"I'll bet my bottom dollar on war," Ridgway would say. He was an educated man, but his education was now somewhat obscured by a heavy varnish of Western thought and expression.

"I'm afraid it must come to that," Heaton would answer.

"Afraid!" exclaimed Ridgway, after one of these customary preliminaries of conversation. "Western men haven't got much to be afraid of in a thundering good war, anyhow."

"But war is never good, whether thundering or not. It is a terrible evil, only to be resorted to in order to avert a greater."

"That may be the case with you Eastern men. But see how it will work here. Prices will go up like shot."

"Will you volunteer?" asked Heaton, not interested in prices whether up or down.

"No, siree. I sha'n't enlist, I can tell you. I'll buy up all the horses I can lay a finger on and sell them down at Fort Leavenworth. That's what I advise you

to do too. There's a pile to be made out of that, if only we have a war."

"I shall volunteer," repeated Heaton dreamily.

"Catch me!" remarked Ridgway.

"Perhaps there'll be enforced enlistment. You'd be taken among the first, a strapping young fellow and a good shot," observed Heaton.

"I'll get my front teeth drawn sooner than that," said Ridgway, with decision.

"What good would that do? Only spoil your beauty."

"I couldn't bite off the cartridges. I heard a fellow say at Fort Leavenworth that no man could be a soldier now who couldn't bite with his front teeth, on account of these new cartridges."

Heaton laughed. "You weren't born yesterday, that's clear, anyway.

"There ain't no one'll take such good care of John P. Ridgway as I shall, you bet."

He was not really a bad young fellow at heart, for all he was so self-centred. He didn't "lay out" to be anything else than a thoroughly wide-awake Western man, trying to get ahead of every other man if he possibly could, but he was good-natured to his friends and was not at all selfish in little things, which, after all, is what tells in every-day life.

CHAPTER XI

THE BUFFALO HUNT

SALINA was a miserable little squatter town on the very last limit of civilization. It would have been utterly ashamed of itself only that it looked hopefully forward to the day when it should be a proud city. It never reached that day, but this failure could not be expected to trouble its early aspirations, any more than the prospective failure of a middle-aged man could weigh in anticipation on his boyhood. Salina was young, therefore she was proud and hopeful. South of Salina, some thirteen miles away, rise the "Smoky Hills," as lonely and desolate a place as can well be imagined, but one possessed of a certain fascination for travellers in the days long ago when that region was as yet well-nigh unexplored. No interest attaches to a low range of monotonous hills when you know exactly what other range comes next, and so on and so forth to the end of the map. But when Heaton went to Salina the Smoky Hills were the very edge of civilization. Beyond them imagination and the buffaloes held possession of the plains, and this was exhilarating. When one morning he walked toward them and saw a small ravine with some trees refracted clean out of the depression in which they habitually lay he felt a keen delight in the novel spectacle. The blue haze which hangs over the hills and which furnishes them with their name was still visible in winter, though in a less

degree than in summer and autumn. Beyond these delights of pure sentiment Salina possesses no charm whatever, and after laying in a further supply of necessary provisions the hunters went forward.

A local man, a wolf hunter, accompanied them in order to get their protection in return for hints about the country, such as strangers might find useful. Wolf hunter is a fine sounding name for one who followed a mean and most unsportsmanlike trade. Never a shot fired he, never a trap did he set, but merely entered upon his trip with his pockets stuffed with strychnine. Having poisoned a quantity of meat near some water he sat down and waited. The wolves came, ate, drank, and were conquered. This wholesale poisoning cleared every dog out of the country as well as the wolves. When man invades a new region he lays about him right masterfully; trees, animals, everything is swept away wholesale, until nothing remains but malarial fever and the mosquitoes to reduce him to a proper sense of his own relations to the universe.

Twenty-five miles was a short day's trip, but as that was the distance of a certain cave known to the wolf killer Heaton and Ridgway determined to camp there for the night.

“It's a powerful cute cave,” said the wolf killer; “slep' there heap o' times. There ain't nothin' better nor a cave, mos' as lief sleep there as in any cabin I ever seed. There ain't no children screechin' in the cave, and they most allers is in cabins. Children is pesky critturs for making noises.” He was in the habit of lying “in cache” for the wolves to come along and feed on his poison meat, so the constant noise of children struck him as something particularly odious and difficult to deal with.

“Land o' liberty! do you call that a cave?” cried Ridgway, when he was shown a hole in the rock where

a man could with circumspection stand up in one spot only.

"Wal, I guess you won't git any better cave nor this—no, not if you scour the plain as far as Pike's Peak," said the wolf killer, somewhat crestfallen at the scorn with which his cave was viewed.

"It's bigger than the wagon, at any rate," said Heaton politely.

"Guess if that ar cloud come 'long this er way you won't find the cave so bad."

They all three got into the cave and soon fell asleep, as tired men do when they lie down. In the middle of the night Heaton was roused by feeling something tugging at his beard. He put up his hand and caught hold of a rat.

"Yah!" he yelled, having a special horror of rats. At the same instant there was a flash of lightning and a clap of thunder right overhead.

"What's the matter with you?" growled Ridgway. "Are you struck by lightning?"

"No," said Heaton; "but there was a rat eating my beard."

"What a tarnation howl for nothin'!" remarked the wolf killer, wrapping his head in his buffalo robe and going off to sleep again.

It thundered and lightened and rained a good part of the night, but the cave kept the men dry. When they saw their soaked wagon covers in the morning, with the wet trickling down every rib and making pools inside, the wolf killer asked, with a triumphant air:

"Wal, what d'yer think o' the cave now yer've tried it?"

"I wouldn't have been anywhere else last night for ten dollars," said Ridgway, making the *amende honorable*.

"Jess so. I 'lowed you'd fin' it fust-rate when you

knowed by trial what it was. I don't never say what a horse is worth myself until I've tried it."

"It's a good, safe rule to go on," assented Heaton.

The wolf killer grinned affably.

"You'll be a-scenting them buffaloes 'bout sundown to-morrow," he observed by way of parting advice, as the young men were preparing to go their way. "Buff-loes ain't afeared of nothin' 'cept a man stan'ing on his hind legs. You'll have to crope up on yer belly ter git inter range. The bulls is pesky critters to kill an' powerful tough to eat."

"We sha'n't waste a shot on a bull, I can tell you," remarked Ridgway. "We ain't like those fellows that jest lamm away at anything for the fun of it. We're going to make money out of this business or I'll declare off, I will."

"Guess you're smart 'nough, so I'll git, anyhow. Mornin'."

He trudged off through the short yellow grass, and the young men drove away in another direction, and they soon lost sight of each other.

It was not without reason that the wolf hunter had said they would be "scenting" the buffaloes, for the first intimation that the hunters had of the proximity of their game was conveyed to them by the sense of smell. Dead animals in every stage of decomposition were strewn all along the track they were following. A great amount of buffalo meat had been taken in this season of dearth, but the slaughter and waste had been greater still. Animals had been destroyed by the thousand, to serve no possible good, while their rotting carcasses only helped to vitiate the air for miles around. The buffaloes backed slowly farther and farther away from the destructive advance of man, and were fully sixty miles from Salina when Heaton and Ridgway went forth to hunt.

A long dreary day of drizzling rain had to be endured before they reached the hunting grounds. Ridgway was filled with disgust.

"Unless this wet spell stops we sha'n't be able to save half our meat. We can't salt very much, and there'll be no keeping it unless we are helped by a frost."

The outlook was not cheering from the money point of view, but when they saw a dark brown line against the distant horizon their spirits rose and the hunter instinct was awakened.

These were the buffaloes.

The wagons and horses were left, and the hunt began by Heaton and Ridgway walking on their hands and knees for fully half a mile. Never before had Heaton covered so short a distance in so painful a manner. His knees were bruised and so were his hands, his shoulders ached, and his head seemed to be bursting with the pressure on the back of his neck. Several times he lay flat down in his misery and actually groaned. Ridgway also lay down, only he swore with vigour to relieve the pressure of his feelings. Again they crept forward, in single file this time so as to lesson the chance of being seen, Ridgway in front with the muzzle of his gun pointing forward, Heaton just behind with his muzzle pointing backward. At last they got within a long-range shot, when an old cow, who had been looking intently at them from a slight hillock, came to the conclusion that there was something uncanny in the curious long beast that was creeping up. She gave a loud bellow of alarm, and instantly the whole herd galloped off a half mile or more.

"The blamed critters!" said Ridgway in disgust. "Just see how spry they scoot along on all fours and look at us!"

Heaton lay on his back and stretched himself in order to rest his strained muscles.

"I suppose we'll have to crawl after them. About what is a good day's march for a buffalo hunt, eh? Two miles? I don't think my knees will stand more than that," he observed, looking up at the watery sky. The rain had stopped, but the ground was wet to add to their discomfort.

"Now, whatever you do, mind and don't hit a bull," said his companion. "They always charge when wounded, and they are the deuce to manage. You might as well have a tiger at you. There was a fellow killed here this summer, I hear—a fool of an Irishman; he got his dander up shooting and blazed away anyhow. The first thing he knew he hit a bull in the flank, but didn't break a leg or disable him, and the next thing he knew that bull was down on him like a streak of greased lightnin', and the Irishman was gone to the place where good Irishmen go, or where the bad ones are sent to—jest tossed clean out o' life while you'd say 'Stars and Stripes.'"

Again they crawled or rather wormed themselves forward, single file as before, and this time they got near enough for Ridgway to fire. He did so, and the animal instantly lowered his head.

"Jerusalem, if it ain't a bull!" exclaimed the hunter, enlightened as to the sex of the buffalo by the way in which it had resented being shot.

"Lord!" exclaimed Heaton; "what had best be done?"

"Lie quite still; he don't see us. He's a young one and not very cute yet. He don't know what to do."

"Lucky for us!"

"You bet. Guess I'll be more careful next time," said Ridgway, considerably crestfallen at his mistake.

They lay still a long time until the herd had again

settled down to feeding, and then they got a little nearer by working themselves forward with their elbows while lying flat on their stomachs.

“A quarter of a mile a week would be a good racing record for this method of locomotion,” remarked Heaton, with concentrated scorn.

They were now within about a hundred yards of the herd—as near as it was safe to get.

“Now, then, show your style. We sha’n’t get a better range than this,” said Ridgway.

Heaton fired, and a fat cow fell.

Instantly the herd was in commotion. They never attempted to run away, but crowded round their wounded comrade and showed the greatest concern for her, bellowing and making cries of distress. As she fell to rise no more the bulls became greatly agitated. They tried to raise her with their horns, putting their great shaggy heads under her heaving flanks and doing their best to prop her up and get her on her feet again.

“Poor brutes!” said Heaton, watching their futile efforts with a feeling of pity. “See how distressed they are! Man only is remorseless, crushing and destroying everything in his relentless march toward his own comfort.”

Two more young heifers were shot. The bulls faced round, forming a ring on the outside of the herd, bellowing and glaring in aimless fury at the invisible foe that was harassing them. There was a vast amount of useless courage and anger stored up in their shaggy breasts, if only they had known upon whom and what to expend it. Fortunately for the hunters they did not know, so the men lay in the grass loading and firing very slowly and with much difficulty, while the bulls stamped and pawed and bellowed to no purpose. As often as they quieted down and opened the line of defence somewhat, another shot, another pinging whir

through the air, and another bellow of despair, told that some one had fired and some one had fallen. And after each shot the bulls offered again their useless help in trying to raise the stricken cow, and again faced round and roared and bellowed with impotent rage. They did not understand that it was the firing did them the harm, or they could easily have trotted out of harm's way; or possibly they did understand that, but could not make out where the shot came from, seeing no enemy.

The hunt, if that is the name to be given to the crawl, and the snake wriggle, and the firing, had lasted about three hours, when Ridgway said:

“We've got two wagon loads now; we can't carry off any more meat.”

“Then in Heaven's name let us stop; I've had enough of shooting like this,” said Heaton, who very quickly got his fill of mere killing. “How shall we drive off the herd so that we can gather up our meat?”

“Just stand up, and say Glory, halleluiah! or Star-Spangled Banner, or any other tarnation thing you like, loud enough, and they'll stampede straight.”

So they stood up and yelled in unison, and the buffaloes, at last recognising the enemy of their race, galloped off in terror, with a few wounded animals in their midst, who later, no doubt, dropped in their tracks and added a few more whiffs to the pestiferous air of the plains where the hunters love to operate.

Two puny men standing up and yelling at a thousand buffaloes to make them run is surely a striking example of the force of mind over matter. Any one of those bulls could have crushed the life out of those hunters, the herd with a rush could have stamped them into dust in a few seconds, and yet they fled before their puny adversaries, carrying away in one thunderous rush all that strength and courage with which they had been so uselessly endowed. The mighty herds that

used to darken the prairies in the days long ago are all gone, and in their place stands man, lord of creation, exultingly surveying the desert which he has made around him by the extermination of the wild creatures of the earth. Instead of buffaloes on the prairies, as in the brave days of old, we now have the domestic pig wallowing in the mire and eating the putrid slush of kitchen refuse; and this is civilization! Some of us there are who would prefer the buffaloes.

And now there followed another scene in the proceedings of so disagreeable a character that we had best draw a veil over it, and if the veil were anything like Heaton, his hands, his clothes, his hair, his boots, in fact every inch of him, it would be a very bloody veil indeed.

Suffice it to say that after two days of desperate hard work they had all their meat safe and salted down and packed in the wagons. The buffalo hides were rolled up tight and placed at the bottom of the wagons under the meat, while the beefsteaks, cut into long thin strips, were hung all over the outside, thus ornamenting the canvas covers with a gruesome fringe. Heaton's nerves were none of the strongest, and he was disgusted with the details of the job, but he never shirked his share of the work from first to last. But when it was all over and he had made a certain amount of progress toward cleaning himself once more he remarked, while putting his hunting knife finally into its sheath:

“ Well, if there is one thing that would make a man abjure the flesh and the devil and turn vegetarian I think it is a spell of butchering work after a buffalo hunt.”

The long homeward journey back across the plains to civilization and commercial profits began under the happiest auspices. The weather “had come round,” Ridgway remarked, as if it was a sulky person who was

beginning to relent into civility again. The wet drizzle had ceased, and a dry northwest wind was blowing keenly across the open prairie. The sharp wind searched out the sore and bruised spots on their knees and made them smart. But it was good for their load of meat, and morning, noon, and night, when the load had to be taken out, shifted, salted, and smelled anew, he greeted the wind with many words of approval and commendation.

“This is bully. We sha’n’t lose a pound of meat if it lasts. We could stand a spell of yet colder weather though.”

And the wind kindly accommodated them with “a spell.” It froze at night and did not thaw by day. The loads of meat did not require three shifts a day, but only two. The strips of beefsteak outside got stiff and rattled against the stays of the wagons in a grizzly manner, “like dead men’s bones,” Heaton suggested.

At Fort Riley they had their horses fresh shod with frost calks. The people there urged them to stay, as the weather looked like turning dangerously cold. It had done so a couple of years before, when several teamsters, caught out in a snowstorm, had been frozen to death. But the young men felt equal to withstanding any amount of cold themselves, and they were anxious to sell their meat. They were advised in any case to avoid passing through the Pottawatomi reservation, since there the houses were few and far between, and it would be hard for them to obtain shelter. So, at the cost of making their journey somewhat longer, they determined to take the southern and more settled route to Lawrence.

This route would take them through such classic and poetic spots as Mountain City, Alma, Brownsville, Cow Corner, Carthage, and Big Spring. At each of these centres the blacksmith at Fort Riley could vouch

for the existence of log cabins, whether inhabited or not he could not undertake to say, not having "hearn tell" of the district for some time past. It was not the season for much traffic.

The northwest wind blew keener and keener, the meat was frozen into solid chunks and had not to be shifted at all, which saved them a good deal of labour, but the creeks were beginning to freeze, and they had to break the ice with axes before crossing, which was wet and miserably cold work. The ice, it should be observed, was in the intermediate stage of freezing, thick enough to make the horses slip and run the risk of breaking their legs, and yet not thick enough to bear the weight of the wagons.

"Guess we'll have earned our money when we get it," observed Ridgway, as he sat on the frozen ground and pulled off his fast-freezing boots in order to put on a dry pair. They had just passed a very nasty creek, neither water nor hard ice, but an abominable compromise between the two, through which they had to hack their way up to their knees in freezing water.

"It's all right if only it doesn't snow," observed Heaton, looking anxiously at the sky. "Out in Vermont we used always to look for snow with a lead-coloured sky like that in winter."

"Gol dern it, if it snows we'll never get through," said Ridgway, looking anxiously at the leaden sky himself. "We're eight miles from Carthage by my reckoning. Let's push ahead and cross the last creek by daylight, anyhow. Once we get out of the bottom land we can smell our way to Carthage, I reckon."

So they pushed along as fast as tired and heavy-laden horses could, and got through the creek by the last shreds of daylight, just as a few fine flakes of snow, or rather snow dust, began to be driven against their faces by a fierce northwester.

"This is one of those Dakota gales the Indians tell about, saying they bury men as they walk and smother buffaloes in their tracks. If Carthage don't show up pretty smart we'll go the way of the buffaloes, I reckon."

Ridgway was clearly anxious, and made all possible haste, but it was slow work, since the long hill out of the bottom lands had necessitated their doubling teams to draw up the wagons. One load was standing safely on the high prairie, and the four horses had brought up the second nearly to the top, when the snowstorm became rapidly thicker.

Heaton was in front with a lantern trying to make out the track, when a sudden snap and a stoppage of the horses betokened disaster.

"What's the matter?" he shouted through the storm.

"Don't know yet," said Ridgway, climbing down out of his driving seat and beginning to feel among the horses and the harness for evidence of the nature of the disaster which had stopped them. Heaton came up to him with the lantern.

"The pole, by Jupiter!" exclaimed Ridgway. "Broken clean across."

"That's a pretty how d'ye do," said Heaton. "What's to be done now?"

"We've got to leave this wagon here in its tracks and go ahead with the other to Carthage. Guess we'll make it to-night with four horses."

"And leave this wagon here in the road! Suppose other folks come by—there'll be a collision," remarked Heaton.

"Guess there ain't no other fools cavortin' around to-night 'cept ourselves," replied Ridgway with a laugh, as he began to get his horses free from the disabled wagon as fast as he could.

Meantime the snowstorm was becoming every min-

ute more severe and the cold more biting. It was with difficulty that they were able to make out the other wagon in the blinding storm. The horses got frightened, and, tired as they were, would hardly stand to be hitched up.

“We'll freeze if we attempt to camp in such a gale. We must try for Carthage. It lies due east two miles from the crossing,” said Ridgway, setting his teeth and roaring at Heaton, who was carrying the lantern in order to show the track more clearly to the driver of the wagon. The storm and the darkness increased. The fringe of frozen meat rattled furiously upon the wagon top, almost frightening even Ridgway by the tremendous bumps it gave. The driving snow seemed like a dust storm, so fine and dry as almost to smother them. The horses commenced to cough and sneeze, evidently suffering also, and the youngest began to pant as if choking. Suddenly the wagon went plumb down on one side and stuck. Ridgway got down again and Heaton came back.

“Another pole gone?”

“No. Got into a ploughed furrow, by gosh. Carthage ain't a pistol shot from here, if we can only find it in this blamed storm.”

“If it's only a pistol shot away a pistol shot will rouse it up. I'll fire into the air.”

“Tain't a bad notion. Blaze away.”

Heaton fired, and very faintly across the storm there came the sound of a dog barking.

“Hark! That's it,” said Ridgway. “It's straight ahead.”

“I thought it came from the right,” said Heaton.

“Try the horses. My gray mare's as good as a compass. You bet she knows straighter than we do where that bark came from.”

When the horses were unfastened from the wagon

the young men mounted the best of each pair, and the gray mare was given her head. She started straight off nearly in the direction they had come, heading against the storm, with ears laid back on her neck and head down. The others followed, snorting and coughing, much frightened at the howling storm.

“The mare’s at fault,” said Ridgway, pulling her up and ranging alongside of Heaton. “We’ve lost the scent and the wagon too. We’ll freeze here inside the ploughed land ‘less we can make that blamed cabin.”

“I’ll try another shot,” said Heaton, suiting the action to the word. A much louder bark answered the signal, and a faint flashing light seemed to flicker before them. The gray mare whinnied.

“By Jupiter! she’s right as usual,” cried Ridgway triumphantly. “Good old girl!”

Not twenty yards away they came upon a fence. The barking grew louder, and mingled with it and the roar of the storm there came a faint cry, as of a woman’s voice. Another flicker of light.

“They’re signalling to us,” said Heaton, and raising his voice he gave a long-sustained, high-pitched Swiss yodel note, which sounded over the roar of the storm, and was answered by a chorus of screamings.

“Dish way, Sambo; dish ‘ere de bars!” yelled the voice of an unmistakable negro.

“I never knew a darky act so well the part of an angel of light,” said Ridgway, coming up to the bars which a pair of young negroes were letting down with energy.

“Dat yo’, Sambo?” they asked.

“Where’s the house?” asked Ridgway in reply. “Show us the way.”

The lads led the men and their horses toward the glimmering light. The door was open, and a darkly outlined figure stood there.

"Can you take us in, stranger?" asked Ridgway. "We're caught by the storm, and we've got four horses here."

"Certainly," answered a sweet girlish voice. "It's an awful night for man or horse. Pete and Moses, go and show them the stable. There is room for four horses and there is some fodder. Isn't Sambo come?" she added to Moses.

"No; only white gen'lemen," he replied.

"Thank you, madam," said Heaton.

"Thank your stars we're out of that storm. We'd have all been dead by morning," remarked Ridgway to Heaton as they followed, under the guidance of the darkies, to where there was shelter to be obtained for their exhausted horses.

CHAPTER XII

HELP AT NEED

IT will be remembered that when Nancy Overton sold her farm in Missouri it was with the object of proceeding into Kansas and settling on free soil along with her negroes, to whom she would thereby give their freedom. She was only a young and generous girl, very ignorant of the world and its ways, following in a very impulsive manner her own high purpose without much forethought. For example, had she been wise, or "cute," as the expression goes, she would never have gone to settle in the dead of winter, but would have waited until the spring opened. But she never thought of that. She was eager to be gone with her slaves and save them while yet there was time.

The journey took more money than she had expected, so that she found herself unable to buy a farm large enough for her small colony near Lawrence. Prices were too high. People told her, however, that she could get land very cheap a little way west, and in particular at a spot called Carthage. There the soil was good, the river valley gave convenient timber, and altogether it was represented as an ideal spot. So Nancy, with her negroes, departed out of Lawrence and went to Carthage. Sure enough she found a little cluster of cabins of various sizes, and among them one very tolerable house. The place belonged to a man who was eager to sell. He had had ague for eight weeks, and so had

his family; they were indeed mere shaking skeletons. Nancy quickly concluded the bargain, buying the land, farming implements, and a few gaunt specimens of cows from the sickly owner. She paid very nearly all the ready money she had, and was obliged to throw in one wagon and a pair of horses besides. Into this wagon the late owner got and drove away, leaving Nancy the sole owner of the aspiring town of Carthage, with the land thereunto appertaining.

There were several log cabins collected around the house, and into these Nancy apportioned her negroes, some twelve souls in all, including the children. Now, twelve people, even if their skins be black, eat a good deal, and before she had been many days in her new house Nancy realized that she had not enough corn on the premises to keep them going for a week. She discovered to her horror that the corn stacks, which she had bought standing, and which looked fine enough, had been burrowed into and were almost skinned of their ears of corn. She had never properly calculated either the food supply or the trickiness of a Western farmer, and the vender had not reminded her of her omission. The Carthaginian indeed, true to his name, had displayed a veritable "Punic perfidy." The country round about was bare of inhabitants. They had fled from the wrath to come in the shape of scarcity of food, which was likely to become greater and greater as time went on. Tecumseh, the nearest town, was seven miles away, and was too busy with its own affairs to be bothered with a young woman and a parcel of freed negroes.

These poor creatures were not much consolation to their somewhat quixotic mistress, at least with the exception of Aunt Monin. They had of course no self-dependence, but expected to be fed regularly, as they had been accustomed to be fed in Missouri. They were satisfied with corn bread, but there must be enough and

to spare of that. At her wits' end to know what to do, Nancy had sent her eldest negro, a youth of about seventeen, Sambo by name, and by nature the wildest coon that ever capered, into Tecumseh, to try to exchange a pair of horses for a load of corn. She directed him to go to a merchant with whom she had had some dealings, and implored the latter to attend to this business for her, as they were starving. Sambo had been gone two days, and there was no news of him. Nancy began to perceive that she should have gone herself into Tecumseh, and not have deputed a negro boy to undertake such an important piece of business; but she was busy overseeing the cutting up of some logs which had to be obtained by dismantling an old log cabin which they did not immediately require. It was heavy work, which the negroes always shirked unless she was looking on and lending an occasional hand, and since their fuel for the winter was to be obtained that way and no other, it was important to keep it going.

The weather had become exceedingly cold. The negroes shrivelled up and were well-nigh useless, so she brought them into her own house in order that a single fire might suffice to warm them all with the least possible expenditure of the precious logs. They had passed a long and anxious day, with very little to eat, when the snowstorm came on, and poor Nancy's heart sank within her. Darkness, and no Sambo and no corn —what was she to do? There was only a very little meal left in the bag, scarcely enough to give one whole pone to each person, and three pones *per diem* with plenty of milk was the minimum upon which a negro could well live.

The milk, which was scarce, was given to the youngest children, and Nancy, declaring she did not feel hungry, sat down in a corner of the room, buried her face in her hands, and wept. She had meant well, but

her good intentions seemed all turning to evil. She had meant to act a noble part, setting her negroes free to begin a fresh life, unbranded by the curse of slavery, but all she had done was to bring them from plenty into famine and possible death upon the snow-driven prairie. Her heart turned longingly back to that cosy home in Missouri, and she sobbed aloud.

“Chile, what yo’ pinin’ ‘bout?” said Aunt Monin’s voice at her ear.

“All my life is a failure, and I don’t know what to do,” said Nancy, helplessly raising her tear-dimmed eyes to her old nurse’s face. The other negroes were lying, and squatting, and sitting around the fire in various attitudes of warmth and content. They were talking together in low, subdued tones under the awe-inspiring presence of “Miss Nancy,” upon whom they still looked with a species of distant reverence.

“Yo’ jess put yo’ trus’ in de Lo’d, my precious honey-chile. He comfo’t yo’ in yer ‘fliction.”

“He will not feed us, Aunt Monin, if we can’t get corn,” was Nancy’s melancholy answer.

“De Lo’d he sen’ food out o’ de storm, as he sen’ manna in de wil’erness, ter feed his chillun,” said the old woman, a sort of religious frenzy lighting up her face and making her eyes flame.

“Jess look yonder at young ole Carlo pup, he done scent suthin!” cried one of the young darkies at the fire. They all jumped up as the big yellow dog went to the door and seemed to listen and sniff under the sill.

“See dar now!” cried Aunt Monin, with exultation. “Dat’s Sambo a-comin’ home wid de corn. Glory, halleluiah!”

“Open the door and show a light. Get a torch of pine wood. It is dark outside,” said Nancy.

They opened the door, and a swirl of snow came in through the opening, although it was on the south side,

and therefore somewhat sheltered from the full fury of the gale.

“Lordy, oh!” cried one of the darkies, driven back in alarm; “dat ar Sambo he git snowed up in de drif.”

“Take the dog out with you and listen,” said Nancy.

“Don’t yer go for ter shut de door!” cried the lad in an extremity of terror, shaking from head to foot from the combined effects of fright and of cold.

“Yo’, Pete, yo’ p’ison lazy nigga, yo’ come back in hyar. I go ’long o’ dat dorg an’ bring Sambo in. De Lo’d done hearn de voice o’ de widder an’ de orphing,” said Aunt Monin in a state of extreme exaltation and excitement. She was on the point of stepping straight out just as she stood in her thin cotton frock, when Nancy hastily wrapped her in a huge quilt, head and all, merely leaving her eyes uncovered.

“Don’t venture a single step beyond the corner of the house,” she urged upon the old woman anxiously, as the latter left the room.

The instant the door was opened the dog gave a loud sharp bark.

“Dat Sambo fo’ shu’,” said Aunt Monin with much satisfaction.

She went to the corner of the house and listened intently for some minutes, then she went to another corner and listened again, bearing her ole head to the storm, but all in vain; she could hear nothing save the roar of the gale.

“Lan’! Dish ole nigga can’t hear worth a rotten corncob. I’se gettin’ deef, dat I is, anyhow.”

She was just turning back to the door when a sharp, quick sound aroused even her old ears. A pistol shot, and not far away either. The dog barked furiously. Aunt Monin set up a shrill scream as she ran exultingly back to the house.

“Dar’s de help de Lo’d sen’ yo’, Miss Nancy, in yer

trib'lation. He done got to de bars!" she cried excitedly. "Yo', Pete, an' Moses, jess scoot out an' let down de bars so as de wagon 'ull git safe in. We's gwine ter 'joice in de 'bundance o' de lan', an' have hot corn cake fo' de supper."

The dog was growling fiercely, and the negroes with shrill screamings and screechings rushed forth with flaming pieces of pitch pine in their hands, which they snatched from the fire, but which the storm extinguished almost as soon as they got outside.

"Shut the dog up in my room, Susannah. He might frighten the horses by barking and jumping around them in the dark."

Susannah put her arms around the dog's neck and took him into Nancy's private room, which opened off the kitchen and was reserved to her use, no one but Aunt Monin ever being supposed to enter it. Susannah was a gentle, vacant-eyed creature, who had never recovered the shock of her baby's death at Mine Creek. She was quite harmless, however, and evinced a doglike affection for Nancy. She was not unhappy, for kindly Providence in crushing her with a blow had mercifully laid the hand of oblivion upon her clouded brain. The vacant eye betokened the vacant mind.

As we have seen, it was not Sambo with a load of corn, but the two hard-pressed hunters who came to Nancy out of the storm. Although her native kindness of heart and the hospitality taught by Western life made her receive these unexpected guests with cordiality, she was in truth grievously disappointed to see them instead of Sambo, whose return she was so anxiously awaiting. She could give them shelter from the storm, but she could not give them food. There was no food left, except that mere pittance of cornmeal, and if Sambo did not come sheer starvation stared her in the face. What should she do? She shrank with nervous dread

from proclaiming her destitution before these strangers, but she knew that sooner or later it would have to come out that she had no corn. It came out very soon, for Heaton shortly returned to the house in quest of a feed of corn for his horses, as his own was in the wagon that was stalled in the ploughed furrows.

In the uncertain light of the flickering fire the young man at first thought there was no one but negroes in the room when he entered it; then he saw Nancy, and, taking off his hat, said:

“I come as a beggar. Can you give us a feed for our horses?”

“I would gladly, if I had any corn,” answered Nancy in a sad voice; “but I have none. We were expecting the wagon with a load when you came. There is some fodder in the loft over the feed troughs. Give that to your horses.” Heaton thanked her and went back to the stable, escorted by the faithful Moses, who would have faced any snowstorm that ever blew out of Dakota for the honour and excitement of following a strange white man around and hearing him talk, with the chance of occasionally getting in a word of his own.

One of the chances now occurred, and Moses made the most of it.

“We hain’t got nary ear o’ corn fo’ ter roas’ fo’ we uns ter eat, mas’r. We done eat de corn ’way from de horses a’ready,” said he, as soon as they found themselves once more under the shelter of the stable.

“Good Lord, Ridgway! these poor creatures are starving! They haven’t a grain of corn for man or beast.”

“Jerusalem!” whistled Ridgway; “we can’t stir a step to-morrow unless these horses are well fed.”

“Oh, confound the horses!” replied Heaton angrily. “I tell you the people haven’t anything to eat, and there’s a young girl in the house, too.”

"Well, I'm sorry for her, so I am. This ain't no place for young girls," answered Ridgway, climbing into the loft and reaching down the fodder. Too much depended upon his horses for him not to make them as comfortable as he possibly could under the circumstances.

"This loft will be a slap-up place for us to sleep; fodder keeps out the cold if you burrow into it," he added, always having an eye to the future.

"Say, you darkies, what's the name of your master?" inquired Heaton.

"We uns hain't got none, mas'r."

"That's a fact, anyhow," laughed Ridgway. "This is a free State, you know. I wonder at your asking the question."

"I mean who owns the farm?"

"Miss Nancy, she done buy de lan'."

"Isn't there any man about the place?"

"No, mas'r; on'y we niggas an' Miss Nancy."

"Land sakes, you don't say so!" ejaculated Ridgway in amazement.

"Who is the young lady in the house?"

"Dat ar Miss Nancy," replied the lads in chorus.

"Lord! and she's not got any corn!" said Heaton, putting out his lantern preparatory to opening the door. When they did so they found themselves enveloped in a swirl of choking snow dust, but the house was not far, and, guided by its glimmering light, they rushed across the yard.

"This is my companion—Ridgway," said Heaton, undertaking the duties of introduction, since he had already been in the house and seen its youthful mistress. "My name is Heaton, and we are buffalo hunters."

Then, of course, followed an account of the evening's disasters which had led them to Nancy's door. "It was the greatest good luck I ever had," said

Heaton. "To think of your dog being let out just in time to bark at my pistol shot!"

"Young man," said Aunt Monin impressively, "'twarn't on'y luck what d'rect' yo' ter dish house. It was de han' o' de Lo'd sen' yo' hyar ter save yo'."

"Well, granny, you are right, anyhow, in saying it was the saving of us," assented Heaton readily. "We'd have stood a poor chance of walking if we'd been obliged to sleep on the open prairie on such a night as this."

"De han' o' de Lo'd d'rect' yo' ter dish house fer ter save yo', body an' soul," said Aunt Monin, looking far away over his head and speaking in a strain of exalted enthusiasm.

Ridgway gave a short laugh, Heaton was non-plussed, and Nancy felt a little ashamed.

"She is sometimes a little strange in her language," she said apologetically to the young men. "She was much excited by the storm, and was just predicting help when you came up."

Whenever Nancy spoke to Heaton Aunt Monin watched the pair with a curious gaze, looking intently from one to the other as if she expected something more remarkable than polite interchange of news between total strangers.

"We are not much help, I fear," said Heaton hurriedly, in answer to Nancy's observation, "only an added burden, but to-morrow we shall be able to get our wagon and—"

"Any carpenters hereabouts?" burst in Ridgway hastily, evidently with a desire to stop Heaton from saying anything as to what their wagons contained. He knew that if the negroes were hungry, and aware that there was meat around, they would get it. Although sorry for anybody who might be suffering from hunger, he had no notion of giving a fortnight's desperate hard work in order to feed a parcel of niggers who were noth-

ing to him. There were plenty of hungry people in the world. It was not his business to look after them, but to look out for the interests of John P. Ridgway. All of which was very sound individualism, no doubt, and perhaps not bad philosophy.

"No, there is no carpenter nearer than Tecumseh, which is seven miles away," replied Nancy.

"Maybe we can fix it up ourselves to hold out until we get into a town. We've got a broken pole, you know, and the wagon is stuck fast till it is mended."

"I've a few pieces of timber; if you can mend it with them you are welcome," said Nancy.

"Ain't you got no men folks about the farm?" asked Ridgway, full of curiosity.

"No; I am the only white person here," she said with a sweep of her hand, indicating the negroes, who had formed a circle a little outside when the "white gen'lemen" came in and sat down by the fire. These darkies were of course immensely interested at the arrival of two white folks, but inborn curiosity could hardly account for the way in which some of the elder ones stared at Heaton and made signs to one another as they stared.

"Lord! how do you work the farm? They don't do work worth much," said Ridgway, much amazed at Nancy's answer. "Didn't you raise any corn?"

"I have only just bought this place. In fact, I have only just come," said she, with some hesitation of manner. "They were my slaves in Missouri, and I brought them into Kansas to be free."

"Phew!" whistled Ridgway.

"You did a noble, generous act," burst out Heaton. "It is splendid to hear of a person doing such a thing!"

Nancy blushed up to her forehead, and the firelight danced on her face glowing with the sudden rosy hue.

It was the first word of commendation she had ever received for what she had done, and her blood beat with a quicker pulse in her veins. It is pleasant to be praised, and all the more when the praise comes in an unlooked-for way.

"Most folks thought I was a fool," she said with some embarrassment.

"People are so absorbed in their own mean lives they can't understand a grand action like that," said Heaton with enthusiasm.

"How'll you feed 'em this winter?" asked Ridgway, and his question was like a cold douche upon Nancy's glowing pleasure at Heaton's praise.

"I don't know," she stammered; "I'm trying to sell some horses in Tecumseh. I brought six horses and three wagons out of Missouri. They ought to fetch a good price. They are good strong horses."

"How much do you want for them?" inquired Ridgway, with an eye to business.

"I don't know," replied Nancy simply. "I told the negro to get as much corn as he could for them in exchange. We must have something to eat, even if the horses have to be sold at a sacrifice."

"When did you send him?" next inquired Ridgway.

"Day before yesterday."

"And he ain't back?"

"No."

"Then he's skedaddled with your horses, an' you won't see him again, I guess," said Ridgway in a tone of conviction.

"Oh, don't say that!" burst out Nancy with uncontrollable anguish. "We are left without horses, or food, or anything if he doesn't come back." She sobbed aloud.

"Don't distress yourself so," said Heaton earnestly.

"I've got a wagon load of sound meat not a quarter of a mile from here, and you shall have it to-morrow, half an hour after sunrise."

"I didn't mean to break down like that. I have no right to bring my troubles forward," said Nancy with her chin quivering convulsively; "only you frightened me by saying Sambo wouldn't come back." She turned toward Ridgway and smiled a tearful smile.

"'Twill be all right. Don't you take on," said that energetic young man cheerfully. "Guess I'll ride in to Tecumseh first thing in the morning, an' sorter look up Sambo an' persuade him to come back with his load of corn. Niggers can mostly be persuaded with a cowhide whip or a pistol bullet, if obstinate."

He was sorry for her in her helplessness, and if a little work on his part could make her comfortable he would give it ungrudgingly, but he wasn't such a "natural-born idiot" as to give his meat for nothing, like that "darned fool" Heaton.

At this moment the door of the inner room opened and Susannah with the yellow dog came out. The dog went up to the strangers to smell at their legs, but the moment Susannah caught sight of them in the flickering light she gave a wild screech, and fell upon her knees in a paroxysm of weeping and praying.

"What ails the woman?" said Ridgway.

"She is not right in her mind since she lost her baby. Don't notice her," said Nancy. And then, turning to the old negress, she said somewhat sharply: "Aunt Monin, take her to the loft.—And you young darkies go too." She was annoyed to think that these strange men should see all the defects of her household at the first moment.

They all left the room and went out to their cabins to sleep, but Susannah's cries could be heard above the storm for some minutes.

The two young men also went off to their sleeping place over the stable among the cornshucks.

“Wal, I’ll bust, but it’s the maddest house I ever saw,” remarked Ridgway, as he lay down and dragged around him a thick quilt which Aunt Monin had supplied.

“She’s the finest girl ever I saw. To think of her freeing her slaves like that!” said Heaton.

“And bringing them here in the dead of winter to starve,” grunted Ridgway.

“They sha’n’t starve,” said Heaton; “I swear that!”

CHAPTER XIII

RIDGWAY'S DIPLOMACY

THE sun rose bright and clear over the storm-driven prairie. The wind had sported with the snow and built it into a thousand curious forms. Frozen ripples, as if a sea had been stayed in its course, flowed over broad flat fields; high piled ridges, with a regular cutting *arête* on the sheltered side, had ranged themselves on the edges of the hollows into immature Alps; while deep drifts of finest snow, hard frozen into a compact mass, filled the hollows themselves. Again, the wind had ordered that certain places should be bare, and these were denuded of every speck of snow as if carefully swept by a myriad brooms. The fences, fortified by long-drawn breastworks thrown up by the snow, presented a formidable appearance, with the stakes and riders showing above the rest of the rails and sticking out like so many black rifles from amid the dazzling white defences. Snow, even if helped by a Dakota gale, is, however, somewhat at a disadvantage on the open prairie. It can not build as freely and as fantastically as when it gets into a land of bush and brake, of bluff and crag, against which to pile up its erections. Still, it did the best it could under the circumstances, and failed not to seize every available opportunity. Thus the wagon of meat which was stuck in the furrow land was a fine piece of good luck. So the wind-driven snow played about that wagon, burying first one wheel and then another, and

then scooping up with violent gusts all the snow thus collected and depositing it on the lee side. This seemed so fine a notion that all during that wild night the snow went on piling and building around the stalled wagon, until in the morning a vast, shapeless edifice caught the rays of the rising sun and threw back a thousand tinted sparkles from its glittering walls. As it sported with the wagon, so it dallied with the house, huts, and stalls of Carthage, building, altering, and moulding to suit its wayward fancy, until that little hamlet looked like a collection of enormous white ant-hills, out of which stuck black chimneys, with here and there a forgotten peephole of a window which the snow in its wild hurry had omitted to plaster up.

Into this new and fantastic world the two young hunters looked with many a grunt of dissatisfaction when next morning they arose out of their bed of corn-shucks. The grotesque aspect of the house door, buried nearly to its lintel in snow, did not appeal to their æsthetic sense, but the fact that the door had to be dug out, and that probably by themselves, appealed very strongly to their physical senses by suggesting the amount of muscular effort that was now required of them. Fortunately, the stable door faced the north-west, and consequently was one of those spots which the gale had concluded to sweep clean. So the two men were quickly abroad and as quickly at work. Pete and Moses showed them where the shovels were kept and then stood shiveringly by to see the white men work, as with a measured scrape, scrunch, and swing they began to clear a path to the blocked doorway.

Nancy, too, heard the sound, so strong and so steady, and so uninterrupted, and a feeling of hope and trustfulness filled her heart. Here were white men on whom she could rely. They were not like those poor

helpless negroes who never had any advice or assistance to offer, but only leaned upon her, depending upon her for everything, until the burden had become almost too great for her to bear.

Heaton fairly shovelled himself into the kitchen, and was the first to greet Nancy with a cheerful "Good morning." It was the first time he had seen her in clear light, so that he could really get a good look at her and he thought he had never seen a sweeter face. She was not the rosy-cheeked, saucy girl we saw in the sunlight of that October day not long passed. She was now a serious pale woman, with, nevertheless, a most touching look of girlishness transfiguring her whole aspect. Sorrow and anxiety had paled her once plump cheek, and all the tears she had shed had taken some of the fire out of her eyes, but she was none the less beautiful for that. The defiant sparkle of her glance was indeed gone, but an added touch of seriousness had made her face more attractive than ever. Heaton was fascinated with it.

"I've come to say I'm going for the meat now," he remarked brightly. "Now then, granny, put the kettle on, and we'll all have breakfast."

Aunt Monin was looking at him intently, as if absorbed in her own thoughts. She started when he addressed her, and said quickly:

"Yes, mas'r, I'se gwine ter cook de breakfast dish hyar bressed minute, I is."

"That's right. I'll go now for the meat and corn-meal."

Heaton left the kitchen, and Nancy looked after him with admiration, so full was he of life, energy, and resource. It was a comfort to be taken care of by this capable man, even though only for a single day, and he a stranger. Aunt Monin was watching Nancy with curious intentness for the moment or two that they were

face to face, and when the young man had left the kitchen she said:

“ Chile, yo’ ‘member how Aunt Monin prophesy de Lo’d sen’ help ter yo’ outer de storm an’ de snow an’ de win’? Yo’ see he done it, chile. Now Aunt Monin raise up her voice an’ speak ‘gain. Don’t yer go for ter fly in de face o’ Prov’dence an’ rejec’ de min’strations o’ de Lo’d. Be meek an’ lowly, an’ ‘member de ways o’ de Lo’d ain’t like white folks’ ways. He ‘venge himself in his own way jess when de due time is ‘complished. ‘Member dat, honey-chile.”

Nancy was so accustomed to Aunt Monin’s holding forth in her own mystical semibiblical language that she frequently gave her but a listless attention. She saw no reason why more importance than usual should be attached to her words this morning. They went in at one ear and out at the other, and were clean forgotten long before Heaton got back through the snowdrifts with his load of food.

Soon there arose a most savoury smell of juicy meat frying and frizzling over the fire, mixed with the aromatic odour of coffee. Aunt Monin was in her glory again. She turned the meat and sprinkled just a hint of pepper over it, she set the coffee to drain, and she mixed up a dozen pones and popped them into the clean glowing ashes to bake, and all this she did and yet kept the circle of hungry negroes in order and at work.

“ Yo’, Pete, pull dat smokin’ log outer de fire. Dat spile my bes’ pones an’ make ‘em smoky, so de white folks can’t eat ‘em. White folks ain’t like niggas, as can eat ary sort o’ corn bread. Yo’, M’linder da, wha’ fo’ yo’ starin’ at de white gen’lemen like yo’ moonstruck? Set de table. Git de bes’ white linen table-clof. Spry now, else I’ll whack yer brains out wid dish hyar log o’ wood. Lize Jane, reach down de chiny

cups. White gen'lemen don't drink coffee outer tin mugs, yo' ignunt black nigga. Whar yo' riz?"

And so on and so forth, with an eye upon every one and a threat for most. The unemployed negro children were made to sit motionless, so as not to "'sturb de white folks." Ridgway had fed the horses while Aunt Monin was seeing about the breakfast, and he now joined the expectant throng in the kitchen, stamping the snow off his big boots and coming into the room like a bit of a northwester himself.

"Well, that do sniff good, granny," he observed, coming up to the fire. "Breakfast time 'most ready, eh?"

"Yes, mas'r, I'se done cooked ebbryt'ing," said Aunt Monin, glowing with pride at having once more good victuals upon which to expend her culinary skill.

Nancy and her two guests sat down to the table. The negroes eyed them longingly, and M'linder evinced a tendency to sit down too, only Aunt Monin's eagle eye was upon her in an instant.

"Yo' m'lasses-face nigga, whar yo' gwine?" she exclaimed with wrath. "What fo' yo' don't wait on de white folks? Yo' done clean forgot yer manners. M'linder, I 'shamed o' yo', I is!"

M'linder slunk away abashed, and with a sweep that would have done credit to a London butler Aunt Monin handed a dish of smoking steak to Nancy, saying: "Miss Nancy, will yo' have some o' dish hyar steak, or maybe yo' 'fer ter wait for de stew?"

Nancy smiled, and the white folks helped themselves abundantly.

"Won't you give some to those hungry little devils?" said Heaton, nodding toward the silent row of little niggers, who were watching every mouthful. "They look as though they could eat us with their eyes."

"Yo' niggas," exclaimed the ever-vigilant Aunt Monin, "what fo' yo' gapin' like dat? Turn roun' ebbery last one o' yo', an' face de wall. Don't yo' go fer ter look roun' now, else I'll slit yer tongues out an' fry 'em 'thout a grain o' salt."

This complicated threat overawed the little darkies, who turned their backs upon the too tempting scene, and were perforce content to imbibe delight by means only of their sense of smell. When they were not looking Aunt Monin dug out of the hot ashes her heap of pones and hoecakes, skilfully blew off the flakes of white ash, and piled them upon a wooden trencher. She next poured the stewed meat into a great tin basin and gave it to M'linder. Lize Jane took the smoking bread.

"Now pike," said Aunt Monin with a magisterial wave of her long arm. "Don't yo' show yer black faces hyar 'gain dish mo'nin'."

The little darkies fled out after the two women and the smoking food to devour it in their own cabin beside the house. Aunt Monin sat down with a sigh of relief.

"Dem black niggas ain't fit fer white folks ter sit wid," she observed scornfully, apparently quite oblivious of the fact that her own face was as black as black could be.

"Come along, granny, and eat something yourself now. You've earned it, anyhow," said Ridgway, motioning her to a chair near Nancy's.

Aunt Monin drew herself up with offended dignity.

"I ain't like dey ignunt niggas out dar. I'se bin allers in good famblies outer ole Virginny. I don't nebber sit down 'long o' white gen'lemen an' Miss Nancy. I allers wait on Miss Nancy, mas'r."

"And you couldn't do a wiser and better thing," said Heaton, seeing his young hostess look a little embarrassed.

Much to Ridgway's disgust he found upon examination that the drifts were absolutely impassable between Carthage and the creek, so that he was obliged to run the risk of letting his wagon stand out another day all by itself on the road up from the bottom land. Comforting himself with the reflection that probably no one would be abroad on that road, he and Heaton devoted their horses and their energies to bringing up to the house the wagon which they had abandoned the night before. This was a job of some difficulty, as several drifts had to be cut through, and those young imps of darkness Pete and Moses had to work in a way they never dreamed of before. When the wagon was at length brought alongside of the house they were not even then permitted to rest, but were set to chopping wood by their relentless taskmasters, who sawed and split wood with ceaseless energy and diligence themselves. Night brought them repose at last, and the weary Pete, lying down in his cornshucks beside the exhausted Moses, remarked, as he pulled his warm quilt up level with his eyes:

"Dey white folks when dey got free niggas dey work 'em powerful heavy. Golly, I nebber seed ole mas'r drive de niggas so hard as dish hyar free mas'r done!"

"Hope he'll break his ole neck tryin' fo' ter bu'st de wagon fru de snowdrif'," said Moses, aching in every limb and revengefully inclined.

The next morning, before the break of day, to the disgusted surprise of the lazy negroes, those two indefatigable white men were up feeding and cleaning their horses, and were actually whistling at their work, too. Pete and Moses rolled reluctantly out from their cornshucks, for Ridgway came and stirred them firmly with the toe of his heavy jack boot.

"Now then, you darkies, just scuttle round. It's

'most daylight now, an we've a heap to do before sun-down this day, you bet."

They yawned, they groaned, they shivered in disgust, but they had to turn out, nevertheless, before the orders of that inexorable white man. Hit or miss, Ridgway determined to bring his wagon into safety before night fell. So after a hurried breakfast they set off with all four horses and such tools and implements as they thought necessary in order to cut the wagon out and mend the pole. Moses and Pete shovelled out drifts and laboured fiercely under the eye of Ridgway, while Heaton, who was very handy with tools, fixed up the pole and fastened trace chains to the body of the wagon so that the pull of the leading horses might be brought to bear. It was late at night before the creaking vehicle came groaning and labouring up to the house, and Moses and Pete declared many times that they would "a heap sight sooner be slaves down in ole Missouri than free niggas in Kansas."

It was with feelings of keen delight that the young men looked forward to spending the evening with Nancy after the hard day's work in the snowdrifts. The thought of the cheerful kitchen with its bright fire blazing on the hearth was not more alluring to them than was the picture of the pretty young girl who would be there to receive and welcome them. Women did not abound on the prairies in the old days. Many cabins were tenanted only by men, and personal discomfort, always abundant in a settler's home, simply raged unchecked in the masculine abode. It is a singular fact that, whereas men are very fond of their comfort and are determined to obtain it at all hazards and regardless of expense in civilization—witness the surpassing comforts of the London Club—when it falls upon them to work out their own notions of comfort with their own hands they usually evince a most helpless inefficiency.

They do without things and put up with defects that under other circumstances would provoke a storm of protest. Again, men are strangely devoid of a sense of proportion in matters of housekeeping, and show a quaint disinclination to doing the smallest and lightest housework, even if it is for their own immediate and personal convenience. Thus, I have known a man grow peas in his garden—digging the ground, making the drills, sowing the seed, earthing up the young plants, staking them when older, down to picking and shelling the pods, all with due labour and care—and yet finally fail ignominiously in providing himself with a wholesome dish, simply because he would not take the trouble to boil the peas, but preferred to eat them raw instead.

Now Heaton had been doing his own housework entirely since he came to Kansas; that is to say, he had made his own corn bread—very badly oftentimes—and had boiled his own bacon and beans—far too little to be tasty—for a good many months now, and Ridgway, though a much better and more painstaking cook, had got thoroughly sick of his own *cuisine*. What an amazing piece of good luck it was to find themselves surrounded by a womanly household, the kitchen tidy and warm, the supper ready and cooked, when they got in at night! This was simple bliss to men who had been used to finding their house cold and dark when they came home, and upon whose tired minds and bodies the thought of the preparation of supper fell like an additional load when they remembered that it meant first getting the wood and then lighting the fire before they could even think of mixing the meal and water for their corn bread. And then there was Nancy. Could mortals want more in the way of enjoyment as they sat round the fire, stretching their limbs before the welcome blaze, than to hear her silver laughter and to watch her bright face changing with every moment as thoughts

and pleasant fancies flitted across her mind in obedience to the images called up by the genial chatter. If they had one wish unfulfilled it was only until Nancy assured them that she did not mind their smoking, and, in fact, expected them to light their pipes, whereupon Aunt Monin poked a lot of clear burning embers from under the logs and told them to "set fire."

To those accustomed to the more cumbrous and dilatory methods of civilization it may seem strange that Nancy should have become so friendly with two utter strangers in so short a space of time. Life on the prairie is freed from the trammels and trappings of convention. The people are simple, their ways are primitive, and they quickly form ties of friendship, not waiting until a thousand and one formalities have been completed, as is the case in the more complex relations of older communities.

If the young men looked forward with delight to spending the evening with Nancy, she on her side experienced a feeling of pleasurable excitement in expecting them. The day now held something new for her, and she brightened up both physically and mentally. Nancy had lived too much alone, cut off from the stimulus of outside opinion. Public opinion did not exist among the slaves, at least not in a way to make itself felt. She lacked this most needful stimulus, without which no human being can put forth his best exertions. She had lived entirely alone since her father's death, and was drawing upon the ever lessening reserve of her own innate energy, and she had already become conscious of what an exhausting process this was. These young men from the outside world brought a fresh train of thoughts into her mind and created new motives of action. Vanity, I trust, will not be laid to Nancy's charge when it is found that one of the first outward and manifest signs of this reawakening interest in life

was a desire to improve her personal appearance. She put on a fresh frock for the evening and twisted her abundant black hair into a most becoming knot at the back of her shapely head, and twice put on and twice took off a tiny coral spray before she could make up her mind on which side of her hair it looked best.

All this while Sambo had not appeared, nor of course had the load of corn so ardently expected from Tecumseh. On the third morning the snow began to show signs of giving way before the combined effect of an abundance of sunshine and an absence of wind. Ridgway thought he might be able to push through to Tecumseh, as the roads would in all probability be somewhat more open near the town. Accordingly, after having consulted with Heaton and carefully examined his firearms, he mounted his horse and rode off. He carried his companion's breech-loading carbine slung over his shoulder. When Nancy inquired the object of all these warlike preparations, he replied that he had lived in Kansas a good spell now, and he had always found a first-class revolver mortal handy in any argument he might have if folks was downright obstinate.

Nancy looked scared and said: "Oh please, I'd rather never get the horses or the corn or anything, if it means some one is to be killed."

"Bless you, I ain't goin' to kill anybody," replied Ridgway confidently. "I'm only taking these tools along so as to make folks kinder reasonable." He rode off with a pleasant smile and nod, leaving Nancy with her heart full of dread and anxiety.

"Do you think he is a man of peace?" she asked of Heaton, who was sawing up wood.

"Well, I can't say that it is against his principles to use firearms. He isn't a nonresistant, you know, but he isn't one bit quarrelsome. I can answer for that; I know him well," replied the young man reassuringly.

"There is nothing so dreadful as for people to rush into desperate measures, even to redress a wrong," said Nancy with an expression of pain on her face.

"That's very true," said Heaton earnestly.

"Don't you think Kansas men are very quick to resort to desperate methods?" asked Nancy, balancing herself on a log of wood so as to keep out of the slushy snow. He was at work on the sheltered side of the house, where the sun was already making successful inroads on the snow.

"Sometimes they find themselves in desperate straits," replied Heaton, who found this a painful subject. "People's motives can't always be safely judged by their actions in cases of emergency."

"I suppose so. I used to feel differently about it. But I have changed," said Nancy thoughtfully.

"And so have I," assented Heaton with considerable warmth of feeling. "I don't feel at all about this border war as I did when I first came out."

"Oh, it is dreadful, dreadful!" said Nancy with a shudder. "You don't know what it is like with those terrible raids into Missouri. I have known such awful deeds done."

"So have I," said Heaton, "on both sides of the border. War is a grim pastime, Miss Nancy, and equally hideous whichever side you look at it."

Nancy looked doubtfully at him for a moment in silence.

"How do you think it will end?" she asked.

"Heaven only knows. Nations must atone for their sins even as individuals do."

"If we only can be spared from war and the shedding of blood. That seems to me too terrible even to contemplate."

"It could be done if there were many like you in the South—a slave owner bringing her slaves into free-

dom of her own free will and generosity," said the young man, looking at her, his eyes bright with admiration.

"Hush," said Nancy hurriedly, "don't speak of it like that; it was an atonement."

An atonement! Heaton wondered for what. But he dared not question her further—it was manifestly a painful subject—so he took up his saw again, and Nancy went back into the house.

Meanwhile Ridgway was "bu'stin' fru de drif's," as Pete expressed it, a slow and exhausting operation that fatigued both man and horse. It was the middle of the afternoon before he at last rode into Tecumseh, and after some little time, acting upon Nancy's instructions, he proceeded to Woodhouse's store, where she expected he would get news of her man Sambo and learn the result of his mission. So far he had followed Nancy's orders, but from the moment he got into the store he pursued a line of action of his own devising, very far removed from the gentle expressions of anxiety with which she, poor girl, had charged him.

There were several men lounging in the store when Ridgway slouched in, pistol, carbine, and all, his hat well on one side, and a huge cigar in his mouth.

"Guess you'll be ole man Woodhouse," he observed, with a total absence of his usual modes of expression and putting on a most formidable drawl.

"Yes, stranger, that's my name," answered the storekeeper with the professional alacrity of his tribe.

Ridgway made no reply, but sat down on a barrel of sugar and smoked away in complete silence. The men eyed him with considerable interest and evident curiosity. After a length of time he said, apparently addressing a coil of rope that hung from the rafters:

"Why hain't you bought Nancy Overton's horses? What's the matter with them? Ain't they sound?"

"I ain't agoin' to say as ther's ary thing the matter with them," replied Woodhouse in a nettled manner.

"Then you have bought 'em," said Ridgway quickly, withdrawing his eyes from the coil of rope and suddenly facing the storekeeper with a steady stare.

"No, I haven't," said Woodhouse angrily, thinking that the young man was in some way trying to trap him into committing himself too soon.

"Glad to hear you say so," drawled Ridgway. "I have."

Woodhouse actually gasped with surprise.

"This ain't fair, stranger," he spluttered. "Them horses is in my stable, an' I'm agoin' to keep 'em."

Ridgway sprang to his feet and slung the carbine off his shoulder in a twinkling.

"You're going to keep 'em, by thunder, after I tell you I've bought 'em! I'd like to see you do it. I come here straight and all on the square and ask you if you've bought them horses, and you tell me here before these witnesses you hain't bought 'em. Then I tell you I have, and you say you'll keep 'em anyhow. I ain't a smooth man to argue with, leastways 'bout horses which I've been an' bought. No, by gosh, I ain't smooth. My name's John P. Ridgway, of Lawrence, and most folks know that name all the way from Kansas City to the Pottawatomi reservation."

The stir that the announcement of his name had created bore evidence to the truth of the boast. Most people did know the name as belonging to a young man who had won for himself a reputation for cool bravery and daring where such reputations were not to be earned without deeds to match.

Woodhouse backed down visibly. "I ain't agoin' to spile your bargain," he said with a feeble smile.

"Knew you wouldn't, stranger," said Ridgway affably, "jest as soon as you learned you had a regular

downright Kansas man to deal with. Guess I'll go 'long and have a look at that team now. Got ary lantern to lend me?"

Woodhouse was only too anxious to be rid of his formidable guest, so he offered to come himself and show him where the horses were stabled. So the pair went off together in much outward show of amity, and in a few minutes Ridgway emerged from Woodhouse's stable leading the two teams of horses himself, for, as he remarked, it would be sorter unhandy for him not to have them along with his own nag where he was stopping. He chuckled to himself several times as he strode through the snowy road of Tecumseh, remarking, "he was 'most skeered out of his skin, the darned white-livered prairie dog."

CHAPTER XIV

THE HIRED MAN

RIDGWAY returned triumphant next day with the wagon, a load of corn, and the two teams of horses besides. He had bought the load of corn, he and Heaton jointly raising the money, which they were able to do on the security of their buffalo hides. Both Ridgway and Heaton were known in Tecumseh to be honest men, and their credit consequently was good. Sambo of course returned also, for he had at once appeared on the surface the moment that Ridgway had got hold of the horses. He was in deep tribulation, and expressed much concern for Miss Nancy, left without any food by reason of the dawdling of the storekeeper, who would neither say "yes" nor "no" about the horses, nor give him a load of corn, nor allow him to take the animals elsewhere. Poor Sambo was at his wits' end to know what to do.

When Nancy saw both the load of corn and her two pairs of horses her heart thumped with terror. She fled out hurriedly to the bars, and with white face ran up to Ridgway.

"How is it you've got them both?" she asked anxiously.

"It's all right," replied the young man genially. "He didn't want the horses and we've bought the corn. My mate and me'll want some of it, and you can take the rest."

"Did you kill him?" said Nancy, her lips twitching so that she was hardly able to articulate.

"Lord, no! What do you take us for? Tigers? Kansas men ain't always sighting down on a man and killing him."

Ridgway spoke with a certain abruptness of manner, showing that he was somewhat offended at the extremely low opinion his hostess held of Kansas men.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" exclaimed Nancy with a sigh of relief. "I couldn't guess how you had managed, and you know you did take your gun and pistol," she added apologetically, as if there was some excuse for her feminine alarms.

"I always take my arms along," replied the young man, "'cause I've found them often useful in making people civil and quick to understand my arguments—sorter brightens up their intellects a bit. But I hain't never shot a man without he drove me to it first."

"Yes, yes, I know," she replied, clasping her hands nervously together; "but it comes to that so quick sometimes."

"Well, you needn't take on this time anyhow; I hain't fired a shot since I rode off yesterday."

The two young buffalo hunters stayed nearly a week at Carthage, at the end of which time the roads were open enough for traffic to begin once more, the pole was mended, and Ridgway began to get restless.

"I guess we'd better be starting pretty quick now, or else that buffalo meat of ours'll go to fatten these here niggers," he remarked to Heaton, after they had foddered their horses one night and were standing at the stable door. "There's bound to be a spell of wet weather soon now, and this snow'll melt, and then the creeks 'ull be over their banks, and we won't get a pound of our meat into Lawrence. I say, let's start before sunup to-morrow."

"Well," remarked Heaton with a certain hesitation of manner, "I was not thinking of starting just yet."

"I tell you that meat won't stand a thaw. It'll go bad before we can unload, if we don't mind."

"I guess I'll unload here," said Heaton.

Ridgway whistled.

"Has she bought your load? What did she give you for it?"

"No, she didn't buy the load. I gave it to her, and I've promised to stay and see her crop in, as hired man."

"Jerusalem!" was all Ridgway said, and then he laughed out loud, and Heaton felt inclined to be angry with him.

It was quite true, however. Heaton had decided to remain and work the farm for Nancy, to be paid eventually by having half the proceeds of the crops. She was too ignorant of the details of farming to realize in its entirety what a good bargain she had made, but a load of anxiety was thereby lifted from her shoulders, and she experienced a corresponding sense of relief. She and Heaton had settled this little matter on the day when Ridgway had gone off to the blacksmith's to get the irons put on his new wagon pole. They had looked over the farm land together, and the young man had rapidly explained to her what he considered would be the best course for her to adopt with regard to the ensuing year. In the first place she should fence in a bit of her pasture land in order to keep one horse always within reach, so as to be able to catch the others with the least possible loss of time; half a day's precious working hours were often lost by men who had to hunt their horses on foot. Nancy listened with deep interest to all he had to tell her, and then she confided in him how she feared the negroes could never be made to work hard without being driven to it, and how she would not resort to severe measures with them, because she

could not help feeling that she owed them reparation and must always treat them tenderly. Then he again expressed his admiration for what she had done, saying it was an act of atonement for the wrongdoing of others that could not fail to turn into a great success. He was cordial, he was enthusiastic, and finally he ended by offering to stay for half a year and see her through the worst part of the season, so that her grand experiment might have a fair start. The proposition was very sudden, and Nancy did not reply for a few moments while she was thinking it over. Heaton's heart stood still with apprehension for fear she might say "no," but she did not. She said "yes," and then Heaton thanked her warmly for permitting him to become in a measure associated with her act of generosity for the benefit of the negroes, adding that he had come to Kansas burning with a desire to do something for them, and to help to right the wrong, but as yet he had not seen his way to doing any good.

So Heaton remained as "hired man" to Nancy Overton, and Ridgway drove off alone with his wagon load of buffalo meat. When he reached the corner of the farm he stopped and looked about him very carefully, and then with a chuckle he remarked:

"One hundred and sixty acres of good upland prairie, a sound frame house, a log stable, three nigger cabins, two wagons and four horses, and a pretty wife ain't a bad price to get for one load of buffalo meat. Charlie Heaton ain't the blamed coon I thought he was. Wonder if I'll get half as good a price for my load?"

Life at Carthage was a very different thing after Heaton became the "hired man" from what it had been before. Energy and hopefulness seemed to infuse and inspire everybody and everything. As the ground was still covered with snow it was impossible to do any farm work, and the negroes naturally expected that they

would be allowed to huddle over the fire in an attitude of expectancy for the summer sunshine. The idea of setting out to work in the snow seemed to them preposterous. Heaton was born in the mountains of northern Vermont, where the snow lasts at least five months in the year; therefore he took it as a matter of course. His mind and body were both braced to it by hereditary sturdiness and constant exposure.

“We'll be able to split enough rails for the pasture fence, if this snow lasts,” he remarked to Nancy as they were sitting together at supper. “I'll take Sambo and we'll begin to-morrow.”

Nancy owned an acre of bottom land well grown with trees, and these Heaton decided to cut down and split into rails. Splitting rails is almost the hardest work that ever falls to a farmer to do. Horses can not help. The entire work has to be performed by man, from the laborious cutting down of the tree to the driving in of the wedges into the sawn lengths, until with a crack the log bursts throughout, generally with a jagged end that has to be chopped clean. Sambo and Heaton split rails all day, not even coming back for dinner, as that would have caused a loss of some of the precious hours of daylight, but sitting down on a log and eating their bread and meat as quickly as they could.

Experiences like this make even negroes thoughtful. Sambo came home heavy-hearted and tired in every limb. Pete and Moses were full of sympathy and anxious inquiry.

“Mas'r Heaton drike yo' mighty ha'd Sambo? Yo' don't nebber catch time fo' ter res'?”

“Nary minute; jes' kep' lammin' 'way at dem logs like he made o' brass an' cowhide. An' we uns gotter go outer 'gain in de mo'nin', 'fore de break o' day,” added Sambo in a deeply melancholy voice.

“What yer gwine ter do, Sambo?”

“I’se gwine ter run ‘way ‘gain, an’ be slave down in ole Missouri. I ain’t gwine ter stan’ bein’ free no mo’,” said Sambo with desperate firmness.

“Mebbe yo’ll be sole South if yo’ go inter Missouri,” suggested Pete.

“Den I wo’k ‘longside de udder niggas. Yo’ can’t nebber be druv so all-fired hard when dar’s a heap o’ niggas in de field an’ on’y one overseer to ‘em. He hain’t got eyes all roun’ his head, I reckon. When yo’ is workin’ ‘longside o’ one white man, an’ he’s workin’ too, dat’s when yer back’s reg’lar broke,” said Sambo, speaking from bitter experience.

Now just as these three darkies were thus unfolding their grievances to each other the door opened and Heaton came in with a tin pail in his hand.

“See here, Sambo, here’s your supper of stewed meat,” said he, setting down the steaming pail and taking off the cover. “You must eat a good supper or else you’ll not be able to work. Starved horses don’t pull.”

He left the pail at the elbow of the astonished darky, who never before had known a white man come to a nigger’s cabin in order to make sure that he was well fed. As he ate the savoury and sustaining food he felt mollified toward freedom and its conditions.

“Dish hyar bully,” he observed, eating his stew with vast relish and giving never a spoonful to the greedy Pete and Moses. “Dat dar Mas’r Heaton he’s despit hard driver an’ no mistake, but he’s gran’ ter feed his niggas.”

Sometimes Heaton would take out his gun and shoot prairie chickens, of which Nancy was very fond, and which Aunt Monin could serve up in a way that would tempt the appetite of an epicure. Heaton, with his Eastern ideas of equality, would have had the prairie chickens served all around to the population as far as

they would go, only Aunt Monin had her say upon such a course.

"Lordy, Mas'r Charlie, yo'll spile dem niggas. Dey nebber be no good no mo'. What for yo' give 'em white folks's meat like dat? Dey on'y 'spise yo' an' say yo' don't know ary differ'nce 'tween niggas an' white folks. 'Fore I give dem prairie chickens to de darkies I feed 'em to de dorg. Dat's how Aunt Monin fix it."

"She has her own ideas of rank and quality, which are not lightly to be set aside," said Nancy in explanation, for Heaton was rather nonplussed by this theory of the inequality between white and black palates.

"I must say I find it hard to always understand the ideas you Southerners hold in regard to colored persons," said he, somewhat amused.

"I ain't no 'pinion o' 'cullod pussons,'" remarked Aunt Monin with the most scornful contempt. "Whar I been raised down in ole Virginny dar warn't no 'cullod pusson.' Dar was niggas, an' field han's, an' dar was servants in good famblies. I warn't nebber a field han'. I was allers servant in de big house. Niggas out in Missouri dey is powerful ignunt; dey don't know nuffin how ter 'have 'fore white folks—dey don't, fo' shu."

"Aunt Monin, I think you'd spoil any one," said Heaton, amused at her quaint philosophy.

"Mas'r Charlie, yo' jess go fo' ter axe Pete an' Moses if Aunt Monin ebber spile ary nigga dat yet been bo'n," she answered severely.

"What about me?" asked Nancy.

"Ah, yo', honey-chile, nuffin spile yo'," said the old woman, turning a beaming look of love to her foster child. "De sunshine on de roses an' de dewdrops hangin' to 'em can't spile 'em—dey's roses all de while. Dat de way 'long o' yo', chile."

Country life is often considered monotonous by

those whose only idea of life is the never-ending succession of the more or less fierce excitements supplied by towns and cities. Farm life can never be entirely monotonous to a woman if she takes into her heart the many creatures of the farm and gives them that maternal interest that is always near the surface of any really womanly nature. By habit as well as by instinct a woman takes to young creatures, and if she helps to minister to their wants they very soon enter into her life and fill it full of interests.

Take the early visit to the first calf of the season. With what interest one opens the door of the cow shed. There is the mother, gently anxious, mooing at frequent intervals, and eagerly watching over her shoulder to see that no one touches that precious youngster of hers who has come to fulfil the overpowering mother instinct. And the youngster himself, standing with four legs stretched widely apart, so as to get as firm and broad a base as he can for his soft and tremulous body, he meets you with a whimsical stare of surprise—surprise at the shaking insufficiency of his own legs, as well as amazement that a being so singular as yourself should come to see him. Did ever a lady hear that Mrs. So-and-So was in the drawing-room waiting to see her with half as much satisfaction as that with which the mistress of a farm receives the news of the arrival of the first spring calf?

Of the playfulness of lambs it befits no mere mortal now to speak in common prose, since the poets have long since sung their praises in verse. For this reason primarily I do not mention them, but also because there were no lambs on Nancy's farm, sheep being an unknown animal to the prairie farmer. But chickens abounded, and in these she rejoiced with a truly feminine delight. Hens, being of a shy and secluded nature, unresponsive to advances, and also not much in evidence

in places where poets roam about in quest of rhymes and suitable subjects for verse, have not been selected for the same amount of eulogy and favour as has fallen to the share of the lucky lamb. Chickens, however, are not to be despised. The newborn chicken is almost the only creature that comes into the world a beautiful object instead of a repulsive fright. The much-lauded lamb is ungainly, thin-bodied, and outrageously big kneed; puppies are blind, helpless, hairy slugs; kittens are mere sightless rats without the power of locomotion; birds of the air are wide-mouthed skinny creatures, shamelessly devoid of clothing, so that their internal organisms can be plainly traced through their transparent skins even without the aid of the Röntgen rays; foals are set upon stilts and can't get their heads to the ground; but the chick comes into the world open-eyed, alert, firm on its tiny legs, able to feed itself, and, above all, decently clad in fascinating down. Chickens and baby pigs carry the palm for beauty in the first stages of their existence.

Of pigs Nancy had none as yet, but a few samples of the more portable and prolific hen had been brought in a coop from Missouri, and these were early a source of interest to her. She was not a novice, however, to the delights of country life, and knew well all about hens and chickens and all the small and large creatures that make up the complete farm family, but her interest in them had to be stimulated anew, just as her interest in everything had to be reawakened into activity once more. Without knowing it, she drew her inspiration of life entirely from her "hired man," this complete stranger who had suddenly come into her small world and filled it so full. On his side, the "hired man" drew his inspiration no less completely from Nancy, this youthful lady whom he served so well, but he was keenly awake to the state of his own feelings and

knew pretty well what was happening to himself at least.

It was a strange life they led, meeting only at meal-times and in the long pleasant evenings when they two and Aunt Monin would sit in the flickering firelight talking. Sometimes Heaton would tell of the far-away Eastern States where he had lived such a different sort of life, but generally indeed they talked about the passing events of the day. These were so fresh and so varied to their young imaginations that they felt very little need to draw upon past times. The present was so delightful. Aunt Monin, who surrounded her "honey-chile" with such ceaseless care and tenderness, joined now in every one of her joys, as in the past she had consoled her in her tribulation. Heaton had come quite to like the old negress. She seemed to him different from the ordinary run of negroes; perhaps she was recommended to him unconsciously by the love which Nancy bore her old nurse. Be that as it may, the three lived their strange, lonely, hard-working life together and were completely happy.

The winter yielded slowly to the spring. The logs were split, the pasture fenced in, and a good supply of firewood was cut ready for use by the time the land was open for ploughing, when all hands were of course turned on to farm work. Heaton looked further ahead than the end of the world in his preparations for the future, at least so it seemed to the lazy negroes who never thought of cutting wood more than a day ahead at the most.

Aunt Monin, who though a negro to the heart's core was not at all lazy, was consumed with admiration for "Mas'r Charlie," as she invariably called him. The other negroes addressed him as "Mas'r Heaton" to his face and "ole man" Heaton behind his back. She felt it her duty frequently to call Nancy's attention to the

amount of work which he did and to the general air of prosperous exertion which he had brought into the place, an unnecessary precaution since the young mistress was thoroughly aware of it herself.

"I disremember I ebber say a truer word, Miss Nancy, dan when I say dat outer de sto'm an' de win' an' de snow come de help sent by de Lo'd. Yo' ain't gwine ter forgit dat, is yo', chile?"

"No, Aunt Monin, I sha'n't ever forget."

"An' nebber min' if suthin happen by an' bye dat's 'special uncommon, don't yo' go an' forgit dat, chile."

Once when holding forth in this manner on her favourite topic she suddenly asked, "Yo' ebber see Mas'r Charlie 'fore he come slap outer de snowstorm dat night?" As she put this question she looked curiously at Nancy, as if trying to read her very thoughts.

"Of course not; I never saw him before. How should I?"

"Him ain't a Kansas man anyhow, dat's shu'."

"He came out from Vermont State last summer."

"See dat now!" exclaimed she with apparent triumph; "I knowed he warn't no poor white trash, like dese hyar folks in Kansas."

But if Aunt Monin took an especial interest in Heaton, Susannah, on the other hand, could not endure the sight of him. This was rather an annoyance to Nancy at first, for she had made the mulatto woman into a second house servant, useful in the domestic work along with Aunt Monin. In the beginning these two had always come into the kitchen of an evening when the day's work was over and Heaton was enjoying the customary long chat with Nancy before making off to his own abode, one of the three log cabins which he had appropriated to his own use. Susannah would gaze at him with fascinated eyes for a long time in silence, after which she would suddenly fall a-weeping and

a-praying in a frantic manner, and would have to be quieted by Aunt Monin. This distressed Nancy so much that Susannah was bid spend her evenings henceforth along with the other negroes in their particular cabins.

Heaton had never been accustomed to negroes and knew nothing about them. Indeed, he rather disliked them than otherwise, considering them, rightly enough, as poor shiftless, lazy creatures, of not much use in the world, but rather an impediment to hard energetic work, which was the god of the regular Down Easter. He did not like their black faces; he had, in fact, in common with so many Northerners, almost a repugnance to them, not having been accustomed to them from early childhood. It used to make him squirm to see Nancy put her hands on Aunt Monin's cheek and pat it as she often did. He did not like the touch of their soft oily skin nor the odour that undoubtedly belonged to them. This "nigger smell," as it was contemptuously styled, was denied by fervid friends of the black man as an ignorant libel; it is now known to exist as a scientific fact. All this combined to make Heaton desire to have the negroes as little as possible in personal contact with himself, but he was strictly just toward them and animated by a deep desire to do all he could to ameliorate their condition. Though he might not like to touch them, he never ill treated them in the slightest degree, nor even in moments of extreme exasperation did he ever swear at them. The negroes, on their side, understood his justice in a measure, but they realized much more fully his personal repugnance to themselves, and resented it far more than they would have done a little swearing and an occasional kick or two. Therefore they did not like him, and always kept at a distance from him, never, with the exception of Aunt Monin, speaking to him unless obliged to do so. He, on his side, laboured under all a Northerner's disadvantages, and never could see

any difference between one negro and another. They were all black to him, and for a length of time he did not know the difference between M'linder and Lize Jane, though Lize Jane was the mother of three children and M'linder was a girl of sixteen.

But though Heaton did not recognise the negroes, they recognised him, and it was whispered among them from the first that he was one of the men who tried to run them off in the autumn, when "ole mas'r" was killed in the sitting room and Caesar had drowned his child in a frenzy at Mine Creek. No whisper of this ever came to Nancy's ears, however, for Aunt Monin, who had heard their talk, declared in her most impressive manner that she would whip into a jelly the first nigger who opened his lips upon so painful a subject to Miss Nancy. And since they all loved Nancy in their way and were grateful to her for what she had done for them, they held their tongues, affection and fear both operating to insure silence.

Sambo alone groaned in secret over his wrongs, and notwithstanding good suppers determined to run away from the hard work. He confided his intentions to Pete and Moses, and those young darkies, although deeply sympathetic, were torn with feelings of conflicting duty, first to Sambo and then to Miss Nancy. They compromised by telling Aunt Monin what was in the wind, and she, of course, went straight to Nancy with the news.

The poor girl was deeply grieved, feeling that the great boon of freedom ought to have made Sambo forever grateful, or at least that he ought to have been quite frank and open with her.

"Depend upon it he does not understand his position," remarked Heaton, who was present when Aunt Monin, her eyes blazing with wrath, told the story. "If the fellow knows he may go any minute and that you will pay him his wages he will probably quite give up the

idea. I have made him go pretty fast ahead with the work, and he isn't broken into it yet. The best thing would be to have him in at once and talk the matter over with him."

Accordingly, Sambo was fetched, looking very much scared indeed.

"I hear you are thinking of leaving Miss Nancy," observed Heaton in a friendly manner, which utterly astounded Sambo, who expected to be threatened with a cowhiding at least, if not with actual death, for attempting to run away, so utterly ignorant was he of the primary elements of the status of freedom.

He made some stammering protest which Heaton failed to understand.

"Were you thinking of going to Kansas City? There is work to be had there, steamboat loading, but it is very heavy work and generally kills off young fellows like you. I think you had better stay with Miss Nancy until the spring is well opened. Then you can hire out with some farmer and get good wages straight on through the summer. There'll be work going and plenty this year, I expect. But if you really want to go now, you can do so. Miss Nancy will pay you your wages, since you have worked for her as a free negro."

Nancy handed him a bundle of greenbacks, saying: "This is all I can afford, Sambo. I hope you will do well. I have done my best by you."

Her voice quivered. Sambo was utterly overcome, and fell upon his knees, blubbering like a baby.

"Lordy, Miss Nancy, don't want nebber for ter go 'way from yo'. Sambo stay an' work for yo' all his life, so he will. On'y please, Miss Nancy, yo' ax Mas'r Heaton he let me off nudder half hour at dinna time for ter go sleep a'ter eatin' de vittles."

Heaton could not help laughing. "Poor devil! I

suppose I did work him too hard, and he is not used to it."

Sambo returned to his cabin and kicked both Pete and Moses for having dared to tell Miss Nancy he was going to run away, and promised them a thorough thrashing for themselves if they did not work their level best for her every day of their lives for evermore. The youths were amazed, but forbore from comments, as they were howling over the kicks already received, and were, moreover, in momentary dread of receiving another dose should they offend Sambo in his present savage mood.

CHAPTER XV

CONFessions

THE spring of 1861 had begun, that spring which was to blossom into such a summer and to bear such bitter fruit in the autumn. From the South the storm clouds were rolling up, and the North was preparing to meet secession by force. Excitement was rising to fever heat in almost every corner of the country, except perhaps in that little spot where our interest is concentrated. Nancy and Heaton paid little or no attention to the storm that was brewing. Too far removed from civilization to feel more than a faint throb of its feverish pulse, these two young people were so pleasantly absorbed in themselves and in each other that they did not pay heed even to that symptom of the oncoming of the great struggle. Heaton had no thought, no wish, that was not bounded by and centred in that tiny hamlet.

Of course he had fallen in love with Nancy. It would have been preposterous if he had not done so. He, a young man depending for his whole companionship on a young girl, a very pretty young girl, with whom he was constantly associating to the exclusion of every other girl under the canopy of heaven. He fell in love with her at once, and he fell deeply in love, moreover. He knew it, and he also knew that she would love him; this, not from inordinate self-conceit, but from the plain fact that there was no one else to take her attention off himself.

Now Heaton was of a romantic turn of mind, although he did not suspect this, and sometimes he used to feel a shade of regret that his own love story, the poem of his whole life, was so smooth and uneventful. He saw Nancy every day; saw her with her negroes around her, the gentle yet firm mistress kindly ruling them for their own good; saw her occupied with the daily duties of the house, eagerly absorbed in the excitements incident to the hatching of early chickens; saw her gently concerned when the meal bin was running low and the horses were not available to go to the gristmill; in fact, saw her fulfilling the duties of her station with seriousness and forethought. He knew that he loved her. He knew too that when the time came he could with a word awaken the love light in her eyes. There were no doubtings and trepidations. Did not love, imperious, wayward love, demand something more than this? Some greater test and trial of devotion?

Nancy with her clear limpid eyes stood before him revealed in the girlish innocence of her heart. He never suspected that there might be a fountain of passionate womanly feeling beneath that calm and gentle exterior he knew so well. As they sat in the firelight of an evening, while Aunt Monin poked at the logs as it was her constant delight to do, Heaton would sometimes fall into a waking dream. Nancy, sitting there in her low chair, was not the young girl of the present moment, she was the image of the future wife. And he no longer saw her sitting idly, shielding her face from the bright wood blaze with her small vigorous hands, but his fancy pictured her leaning over something that was nestling against her gentle bosom, while those soft round arms curved themselves into a warm cradle that held within their sheltering barrier something inexpressibly precious. This was the picture the young

man saw in the firelight in the days when the war clouds were rolling up blacker and blacker from the South.

How calm and uneventful the future stretched out before them! They would live at Carthage, he and Nancy together, growing old in the home they had built up for themselves, and hand in hand they would walk on toward the land of the hereafter. Thus mused the young man, holding his first love dream to his heart. Storm clouds might gather unheeded in South Carolina; none were visible over the wide-stretching horizon around Carthage.

At least not to his eyes.

But others there were whose vision was clearer. Aunt Monin saw and rejoiced in the love that was coming into her honey-chile's life, the strong, manly love that she needed to give centre and aim to her own affections and to round off her being; but Aunt Monin dreaded what might happen when Nancy came to know, what sooner or later she must find out, the part that Heaton had unwittingly played in her past life. She knew that there was a side to Nancy's character unsuspected by Heaton, a determination and a will that seemed almost foreign to so young and gentle a creature. It was there, however, and Aunt Monin, who longed to see her fosterling married to this stalwart young fellow, dreaded what might be the direction that strong will would take when she discovered the secret which each was keeping so unconsciously from the other. The secret had not yet been told, and all the old woman could hope was that it might not be told until Nancy was Heaton's wedded wife, when she would find it impossible to break away from him, even in the first outrush of her grief and despair. Meantime, all she could do was to preach in her own mystical way to her honey-chile, and thus prepare her as well as she could for the shock, without actually telling her any-

thing. This she accordingly did at all seasons and under all possible circumstances; but her words bore no immediate fruit, as Nancy's mind was not prepared to understand their true significance, and Aunt Monin dared not make them any plainer.

Love transfigures all things and can shed a halo of rose-tinted light over the most commonplace scene. No girl can ever forget the moment when she first hears the words that awake her heart to love, nor can she shut out from her eyes the scene where those words were spoken. It is photographed upon her mind in the flash which floods her soul with light, and there it remains printed to the last day of her life. Heaton and Nancy were returning together from the pasture field that lay at a short distance from the house, where he had just impounded a wild young Indian pony which he intended to train for Nancy's sole use. It was the first present he had given her, and she was pleased beyond measure at the wild beautiful young creature. They had watched the pony for some time, and were going back toward the house, when Heaton suddenly spoke in a voice that vibrated with a different tone from what Nancy had ever heard before. He told her in a few manly words of his love for her, and asked her to be his wife, and she, not surprised and not startled, had answered a firm, full-voiced "Yes." Then he took her in his arms and gave her the first love kiss that had ever touched those sweet lips of hers. The sun was just sinking below the distant horizon, a red glowing ball of fire, and as it disappeared great bands of crimson and gold streaked the sky above the blue edge of the prairie, looking for all the world like a city on fire, belching smoke and flame into the air. That was the scene imprinted by love's first words on Nancy's mental vision, never to be effaced. In after years it often rose up again before her. It was an omen, but one not to be

understood until after the accomplishment of the destiny it foretold. Such, however, has always been the nature of omens.

Aunt Monin was transported with delight when Nancy, with smiles and blushes and a few tears, announced her engagement to Heaton.

“There is no one now to wish me joy but you, Aunt Monin. Kiss me, mawmee,” she said, using her baby name for her nurse.

“Honey-chile, yo’ jess fulfillin’ de d’sign o’ de Lo’d when he sen’ Mas’r Charlie hyar outer de snowstorm. Dat war de special Prov’dence I done tell yo’ ’bout. Now yo’ raise off de curse, an’ make yer way smooth ’fore de Lo’d, an’ yer days long in de lan’. Honey-chile, yer mother what give yo’ ter me fer ter save me from de sin o’ murder, she see now dis hyar spiation jess gwine ter be ’complish, an’ she rejoice wid de lamb.”

Aunt Monin’s mystical language was not very clear to Nancy’s comprehension, but there was no mistaking her earnest satisfaction at the marriage her beloved child was going to make.

Heaton was even more bewildered by Aunt Monin’s congratulations.

“Mas’r Charlie, the han’ what take ’way kin give back. Yo’ jess take that honey-chile ter yer heart an’ love her all the days o’ yer life. If yo’ ebber cause her pang o’ sorrow, den de curse come down ’gain an’ blight yer life.”

“Well, Aunt Monin, she’ll never shed a tear if I can help it. You may be sure of that,” he said in reply to her somewhat oracular remarks.

“Ain’t so sure o’ dat by long sight, Mas’r Charlie. Dat’s jess what’s troubling me—yo’ dunno what yo’ do. Mebbe yo’ go ’way an’ leave her.”

“How dare you hint at such a thing!” said Heaton in a blaze of wrath.

"Dar's strange an' won'erful times a-comin', Mas'r Charlie, an' de heavens is full o' signs an' won'ers. Yo' see dat blood-red streak in de sky dis night? Dat mean suthin awful's gwine ter happen," replied Aunt Monin, taking refuge in mystery and vagueness.

"What? The red sunset, do you mean? It may betoken a storm to-morrow, that's all," said Heaton with a laugh.

"'Pen' upon it, Mas'r Charlie, dat mean suthin more nor rain an' win'. I'se sight ol'er nor yo' be, an' I nebber seed de sky dartin' flames like dat nowhere, an' I war riz in ole Virginny whar dey have heap o' tings dese hyar folks out on de plains nebber hearn tell on."

How swiftly sped the days of their courtship, and how sweetly!

There was no reason why they should not be married out of hand, a course that Heaton strongly approved of, but Nancy, womanlike, wanted to get a few new things for the occasion. No woman, be she ever so prosaic, could feel that she was properly married unless she had something new in the way of clothes. Aunt Monin, while anxious for an immediate wedding, was strong on this point. Miss Nancy's mother was married in white muslin, with a crown of flowers on her head, and she was married down in "ole Virginny." Nothing else must Nancy wear but white muslin, and in order to have the similarity more complete she must be married in the middle of April, just as that mother had been whom Nancy had never seen, but who had become such a potent influence in her daughter's life.

Mrs. Grundy certainly did not emigrate to Kansas with the first rush of settlers. They lived too far apart and were too busy with their own concerns to have much spare time for criticising their neighbours. Still, whenever two or three women are gathered together one of them is pretty sure to arrogate to herself the office of

critic. Nancy's nearest neighbour, many miles off to be sure, was a widow woman with a son just grown up, and she had had her eye upon Nancy from the start as a possible match for her gawk of a boy. She had sent him on all sorts of errands to Nancy's house, but, as he was hopelessly shy, he did himself and his suit no good, and his mother used to scold him on his return.

Mrs. Hale—that was the self-constituted critic's name—felt it her bounden duty to tell Nancy whenever she made any mistakes, and shortly after Heaton's first arrival at Carthage her sense of this duty necessitated her telling Nancy what a mistake it was to take him on as "hired man."

"I 'low you can't pay him no sorter wage as 'ull make him stay," she remarked on her first visit, after hearing of the new white man at Carthage.

"He's going to stay till the crop is cut, anyway," said Nancy, rather proud of the opportunity of showing Mrs. Hale that she understood her own interest.

"Wal, I reckon he'll mos' likely put in a power o' corn as you can't hill up an' cut—no, not if you had twice as many han's as you hev. You hed oughter hev consulted my son Jeemes. He's powerful cute 'bout farmin' an' all that. There ain't nary one on the prairie 'ull git ahead o' Jeemes, you bet."

When Mrs. Hale saw Heaton, as she managed to do by staying uninvited to supper and finally all night, to Nancy's complete disgust, she had fierce qualms of jealousy as the mother of a possible suitor in face of a probably successful rival.

"Whar you come from?" she asked abruptly.

"From Vermont," answered Heaton, raising his hat with the manners of another civilization.

"Guess you'll not make any great shakes o' farmin' out this er way," replied Mrs. Hale, eying him critically. "There was a feller outer Philydelphy hyar las' year an'

he war sold outer farm an' lan' pretty quick, I can tell yer. Kansas ain't no place for them sarcy Down East folks."

"We sometimes succeed where there is hard work to be done," said Heaton, half vexed at her outrageous self-satisfied impudence.

"I'm outer ole Kentuck. My ole man he come 'long hyar mos' as early as anybody, he did, an' he kep' a-movin' 'long an' raisin' corn in new lan' mos' every year."

"How did you get on in the drought last year?"

"We done pretty tol'ble. My ole man he tuck an' died o' the shake an' fever, an' Jeemes he 'lowed there warn't nary thing better ter do than to go a-raidin'. So he Jay-Hawked a spell down in Missouri, an' he got a heap o' corn an' truck," said Mrs. Hale affably.

"It was a sinful, wicked thing to do," burst out Nancy passionately. "I don't see how you people, who are all for freedom and call yourselves 'Free-soilers,' dare do such things. It is just simple robbery and nothing else. That's what I think."

"Wal, mos' everybody in Kansas is a Jay-Hawker. They can git a heap o' stuff right handy that er way," said Mrs. Hale in defence of the absent Jeemes.

"I don't believe it. They are not all Jay-Hawkers. Kansas men aren't all robbers, are they, Mr. Heaton?" said Nancy with flashing eyes.

"No, indeed," said he earnestly. "The best of the Jay-Hawkers are not robbers; they don't raid for the sake of stealing at all, but for the purpose of freeing the slaves. A great many people are beginning to think that even with this sole object in view it is a dangerous practice. I think so myself. That's not the way to set things right."

"Ef I war a gal as war a-lookin' out for a husband," remarked Mrs. Hale somewhat contemptuously in re-

ply, "I wouldn't look twice at ary man as couldn't ride as peart as any on a Jay-Hawk raid. What we women folk wants is a man as can use his rifle quick an' straight an' defen' us, an' not them sneakin' Yankee fellers as on'y kin talk like a preacher. They ain't no sorter use on the prairie. We ain't ready yet for preachin' fellers. We's turnin' up fresh sod, that's what we're doin'."

"I'd as soon marry a road robber as a Jay-Hawker," said Nancy angrily in reply to this exposition of out-and-out Kansas views.

"Wal, mos' gals out whar I was riz kinder waited till they was axed," remarked Mrs. Hale, with a sting at the end of her tongue that would have done credit to a fashionable lady, and yet she was nothing but an ignorant settler's wife. But she knew where to hit, especially as Heaton was present. "Ther hain't nary Jay-Hawker axed yer, has ther yit? Mebbe they wouldn't care for a wife with no sort o' sperrit o' her own. My son Jeemes wouldn't, anyhow."

This was too good an opening for a return shot for Nancy to neglect.

"I dare say your son's spirit has mostly gone in Jay-Hawking," she said with a toss of her head. "Anyhow, he don't seem to have much left to show off in conversation. He sat here two hours by the clock last week, and all he said was, "Ma's ole yaller hen done laid an egg 'thout ary shell.'"

Heaton burst out laughing and made his escape from the kitchen, thinking that Nancy was a match for Mrs. Hale without any of his clumsy assistance. He did not reappear again that evening, leaving Nancy to wrestle with her visitor as best she could. Mrs. Hale, thus relieved from the irritating cause of her ill temper, became more agreeable and entertained her hostess throughout the evening with a continual flow of conversation, wherein boastings of herself and her son

Jeemes took a leading part. In the morning when Heaton brought her horse ready saddled for her to ride home, she even relented so far toward that young man as to remark, that she "calc'lated he warn't gwinter lope roun' thar ary spell longer ner he could help, an' she hearn tell thar war a man outer Tecumseh as war speerin' roun' ter fin' a man for ter 'tend store for him, an' mebbe he'd suit thar."

Heaton thanked her for the hint, but said that he was quite satisfied with his present situation.

What Nancy had said to Mrs. Hale in her anger remained with him, however, and he often thought over it, wondering in his own mind if he should tell her that he, too, had once ridden in a Jay-Hawk raid to his own deep sorrow. Nancy was, he realized, a woman of strong feeling, and he did not know how it might affect her attitude of mind toward himself if she knew that he had been mixed up in one of those very expeditions about which she used such uncompromising expressions. No one could deplore the results of that fatal ride more than he did himself, but it was quite another thing for him to see the disapproval which he felt reflected in the beautiful eyes of the girl he loved. He did not feel himself such a hero as to be able to run the risk of chilling her regard for him by telling her of the raid. This was the feeling he had in the early days of their acquaintance, and somehow after they were engaged he did not find it one whit more easy to tell her. He dreaded lest she might think that he ought to have told her before asking her to be his wife; and so the days slipped by and the story was still untold.

Their wedding day was fast approaching, and Heaton took himself seriously to task. It was not right to let her marry him without knowing this fact of his past life. Come what may, she must be told before they were married. Of course, in his heart he knew that she loved

him too well to give him up for an act which he had long since bitterly repented, and which, after all, was not an uncommon occurrence in the society in which they both lived. People are judged by the prevailing standard of their surroundings, and not by a foreign or ideal standard. It was their intention to be married in Tecumseh, and then to go to Fort Leavenworth for a week, when they would make some small household purchases upon which Nancy had set her woman's heart. This brief wedding tour would not take Heaton away from the farm work for too long at this important season of the year.

The evening before they were to go away to be married Heaton and Nancy were sitting together in the kitchen alone. All their small preparations were made, and they were to make an early start the next morning, accompanied by Aunt Monin and Sambo, who, after acting the part respectively of bridesmaid and groomsman, were to bring back the wagon, while the newly wedded pair were to proceed by stagecoach to Fort Leavenworth for their honeymoon, as it is called, or honey week, as it was really to be.

Heaton, loverlike, was holding Nancy's hand as he sat beside her.

"My dearest girl, there is something I want to tell you. I am going to confess, as they say. I don't want you to marry a man about whom you'll have anything to discover later on."

His voice was not quite steady, and a fine observer would have noticed that he drew his breath quickly, as if he were not quite sure of himself. Nancy turned her dark eyes upon him and gave him a look of loving trustfulness, as much as to say that absolution awaited him. Confession was but a formula.

"Nobody can feel more strongly about the evils of Jaw-Hawking than I do. You have often heard me say

so; but when I first came out here I was full of wild excitement. The John Brown fever had caught me, and I saw nothing unjust in freeing negroes by force. I saw only the ultimate effect—that of freeing the slaves. I did not realize what might be the accompanying details. There was a raid last year, and hearing my neighbours speak about it I joined, without any distinct comprehension of what I was aiming at accomplishing, and God knows without any idea of what I was going to do."

"What time of year was it?" asked Nancy. She withdrew her hand from his clasp. He felt a pang at her doing so, but he answered the question.

"It was the second week in October."

Heaton did not look at Nancy as he spoke; he feared to meet some look of disapproval in her dark glance. Had he looked he would have been startled to see how ghastly white she had become. He continued his narrative in a steady voice, telling the plain facts, not trying to excuse himself in any way.

"I was living at Keokuk, in the southern part of the State, where I told you I have some land. We rode across the Missouri line and separated into parties of five, to go to the different farms around and collect up the negroes. I was ordered to go into a certain house and keep the inmates quiet. They told me I would have no trouble, as there were only women and an old man there. I remember the house so well, standing a little way back from the road, looking so peaceful in the afternoon sunlight. There was a veranda with some grapevines and roses growing over it, and a bit of ivy just turning red at one end."

Nancy's face was awful to behold. Her eyes glittered unnaturally and were distended as if she were looking at some hideous object that froze her heart with horror, yet from which she was unable to remove her horror-stricken gaze. Her cheeks were colourless,

her lips were blanched. Heaton without looking at her continued his story, longing for some sign of affection and forgiveness from her, yet too proud and too just to beg for it until the whole of his fault should have been laid before her.

“I went into the sitting room; it was darkened, but a man sat in a chair. I told him I was a Jay-Hawker, and had come for his slaves; that resistance was useless. He raised his head, gave me such a look of defiance, and told some one to fetch his gun. I didn’t see any one in the room. I dared not take my eyes off that man’s fierce face for fear that he should spring upon me and unarm me. Some one, a girl I think, handed him a gun, and I saw him raise it to fire. It was my life against his. I had never meant to kill him, but he forced my hand. I had to do it to save myself. Was it very wrong, Nancy?”

He looked at her then. Great God! was that Nancy?

She had risen to her feet and was backing slowly away from him; she threw up her hands with a gurgling cry in horrid imitation of that man in Missouri after he had been shot, and her head was falling back, her eyes staring, her face a dreadful green-white hue, the hue of death. The door of the inner room opened quickly, and she fell back into the arms of Aunt Monin, who had heard the cry. Heaton gazed at her in speechless amaze. He had never suspected that her feeling about the events of that raid would have been so strong.

“Ah, Mas’r Charlie,” said Aunt Monin’s voice in deeply sorrowful cadence, “yo’ done hit her plumb fru de heart, jess like yo’ did her father. Po’ honey-chile!”

Heaton gave a hoarse cry.

“What does it mean?” he asked, panting.

“Dat war her father yo’ killed las’ fall in Missouri. I seed yo’ an’ knowed yo’ ‘gain de minute yo’ come inter

dish hyar house. She nebber knowed yo', an' now she's struck fru de heart by yer han' too, Mas'r Charlie, same like her ole dad war."

"This is the curse of God!" exclaimed Heaton, rushing wildly out through the door into the gathering dusk.

CHAPTER XVI

OFF TO THE WARS

HEATON spent the night which should have been the last of his bachelor life wandering about the prairie, a prey to the wildest grief. To think that of all the men who fell in the long border war which was waged between Kansas and Missouri the only one he had killed should have been Nancy's father! Hers, then, was that wailing cry that had rung in his ears that day and had rung in his heart for so many days afterward. How cruel, how inexorable was Fate, which had decreed that he who loved her with his whole heart should be the one to make her life desolate! He could not picture to himself a more awful destiny, and turn it as he would in his mind he could see no light and no hope anywhere. The brand of Cain was on him still, and verily his punishment was almost more than he could bear. So all through the spring night he wandered about, too wretched to remain at home, and on the morning that was to have been his wedding day he returned to his little cabin, looking as if a year of suffering had passed over his head.

The news that Miss Nancy was ill and that the wedding had been put off soon spread among the negroes, who went about with faces of mystery, wondering what had happened. No one but Aunt Monin knew that it was Heaton who had fired that fatal shot, and she had never told any one. The other negroes, although per-

fectly aware that he had ridden in the raid and was among those who fought at Mine Creek, did not know the particulars of what had taken place beyond their immediate observation. None of them had been in the house when Overton was killed, and, beyond the fact that the old mas'r had been shot by one of the Jay-Hawkers, they knew nothing. Thus they had no clew as to the cause of Nancy's sudden illness, but they were full of curiosity and awe. Heaton spent the whole day shut up in his cabin, seeing no one and speaking to no one. Poor fellow! It was a lonely vigil for him to keep on that day of all days.

Toward the afternoon Aunt Monin went to him with some food. He was sitting with his head buried in his hands, the picture of hopeless despair.

"Mas'r Charlie, why don't yo' pray for de Lo'd ter show yo' some sign, so yo' know what ter do in de day o' 'fliction?" said she, looking sorrowfully at him in his dumb despair.

"I can't," said Heaton, raising two mournful eyes to her face with a look of hopeless misery. "Tell me, how is she?"

"Dat honey-chile's heart done broke," answered the old woman with a sob.

"Can't you comfort her? Can't you say something to her?" he asked with pitiful eagerness.

"Ole Aunt Monin can't say nuffin, Mas'r Charlie. She on'y pray, an' mebbe de Lo'd he put words o' comfort inter de ole nigga woman's mouth what'll give hope an' cons'lation to de suff'rin' chile."

"What did she say?"

"She don't say a heap nohow, Mas'r Charlie. She like she done lost de power o' speech sometimes, an' she on'y sob an' cry an' say dat she love yo' so, ah, dat she love yo' so!"

Heaton shivered.

"Dat honey-chile," went on Aunt Monin, while the tears ran down her old withered cheeks, "she ain't like mos' gals. She war allers mighty lonesome, an' live by herse'f de whole life long. She didn't go fo' ter have heap o' lations, like some folks. She hadn't no mother, on'y jess her ole dad, what she love. Den de han' o' de Lo'd fall 'pon him, an' he war taken from her. Den she didn't have nobody lef' 'cept ole Aunt Monin to love. Den bimeby yo' come 'long, Mas'r Charlie, an' I 'low dat war de spiation fo' dat sin o' spillin' blood. An' she love yo' like yo' don't know how much. She jess give yo' all de love dat go ter father an' mother an' sisters in mos' gals. She didn't have nary one to love 'cept yo', an' yo' got it all. Den dar come de rev'lation 'bout de killin' o' de ole mas'r. An' she 'pears like she can't nebber forgit dat yer han' has pulled de trigger what kill her old dad. She don' see dat war de han' o' de Lo'd what done dat ar in spiation o' de sin what he guilty of."

Heaton was not listening to this last remark, and if he had listened he would not have understood to what she alluded. His mind was riveted upon one thought: his hand had slain her father. Could he marvel that she shrank from him instinctively? She saw blood on his hand, and that blood was her father's. It would be almost unnatural had she not shrunk from him, and yet he was the one being in the whole world whom she most loved.

"I must see her," he said at length. "I must try and talk to her and set it before her in a different light."

He started to leave the cabin, but Aunt Monin stepped quickly before him. "Mas'r Charlie, yo' mustn't go an' try fo' ter see her. She don't want yo' ter do dat. She done tole me so."

The young man sat down again. Nancy's slightest wish was law to him.

"By and bye mayn't I see her? I am sure I could say something to her," he urged.

Aunt Monin shook her head.

"I don't reckon you'll ebber see her 'gain."

Heaton sprang up with a passionate cry.

"Aunt Monin, don't say that! It is wicked. She will love me again after a while when she has had a little time to get over it."

"Mas'r Charlie, she love yo' now dish dressed minute. Dat what she say all de night long, dat she love yo' so. Dat's why she's gwine 'way."

"She mustn't go away. Why should she go?" he asked, tramping up and down the small room, pressing his hands together in his agony of mind.

"She say she gwine 'way 'cause she can't stay near yo', an' she love yo' always. She's gwine ter Lawrence ter live dar. An' she say yo' can keep de farm an' de crop."

"Tell her she mustn't," said Heaton with desperate earnestness. "Tell her that if she does not want to see me, I will go away. Tell her I will stay away until she calls me back. She must not go away. I can not bear it. I have twice wrecked her happiness and twice broken up her home. Oh, my God!"

He sat down again and hid his face in his hands, his whole frame shaken by a bitter sob that came from his very heart. Aunt Monin looked at him in mournful silence, and when the frantic paroxysm of his grief had spent itself, she said: "Can't yo' eat a little mite o' vittles, Mas'r Charlie?" She set the plate she had brought before him on the table, but he only shook his head and pushed it away.

"Miss Nancy, she done tole me ter make yo' eat a speck o' suthin," said the old woman.

"Did she want me to?" asked Heaton, raising his eyes.

“ Yes, Mas’r Charlie.”

He forced himself to eat a few mouthfuls, and then Aunt Monin went away, leaving him to his mournful reflections.

When two days, two unutterably long days, had passed, and still Nancy did not see him, he began to realize that it was her determination not to see him again. The thought when first it presented itself to his mind had been dismissed as too miserable to be endured, but as time went on and still Nancy would not see him he began to perceive that the idea must be borne no matter how terrible it was. For them to remain so close together and yet so far apart was living death to them both. Life like that could not go on. He resolved, therefore, to go away at once. It was with a sort of savage rage that he saw there was work for him to do which might soon put an end to all his misery.

It was the third week in the month of April. Fort Sumter had been fired upon and captured by impudent South Carolina, and already the ominous tramp had begun in the North of men marching South to fight for the preservation of the Union, which, whether they reasoned it out or not, was instinctively felt to be the very life of the nation. The first call had been made for volunteers to serve for ninety days, so little did men then foresee the course of that long and bloody struggle. On the fourth day of his misery Heaton rode into Tecumseh and gave in his name as a volunteer. He was ordered to join a troop from Fort Leavenworth which was to start for the Potomac, whither all the men were hurrying, and that within twenty-four hours. Time pressed and men were wanted to defend the capital as fast as possible. The Sixth Massachusetts had already gone to Washington, and had been set upon by the roughs of Baltimore, and had been obliged to fire their

first shots in the streets of that town in self-defence. The war had in veriest truth begun.

Notwithstanding his grief and the bitter ending of his brief love story, Heaton could not help a certain feeling of exhilaration as he rode back from Tecumseh to Carthage. He had now something to do, something that would absorb all his faculties and give no time for vain regrets and hopeless musings. Physical exertion in some measure drives away sorrow. It is the deadly inaction after grief that makes such deep scars upon the heart. Thus men are the more rapidly able to recover after a blow than women, because they are out in the world and can not give so much time to their sorrows as women can. As he rode along the familiar track the young man paused for a moment to look about him. His eye swept the horizon, bordered by the blue woods of the Kaw River, as it came from the mysterious West and pursued its way to the far distant Gulf of Mexico. The rolling slope of the near ridge of prairie showed the tender green of the early springing grass, and there in the foreground lay the cluster of cabins which had been to him a home, and which held all that was most dear to him on earth. There was Nancy's window, and there the door where in memory he would see her stand long after he had left her, maybe, forever. That was the door where he had seen her standing on that snowy night with the flickering firelight just catching the silhouette of her face and drawing shining lines of light in her black hair.

People say that when men are dying they see visions with wonderful clearness. As Heaton sat on his horse looking at this view he wondered if he were killed should he have time before breathing his last to see again once more that vision of Nancy in the doorway. That was the vision he wanted to carry with him into the grave, and not that other vision of a grief-stricken

woman with despairing cry falling backward into the arms of her old nurse.

Was this, then, to be the end of his young love dream—that love dream that had seemed to him to be destined to follow so serene and smooth a course? He remembered with a pang of remorse how sometimes half-formed thoughts or fancies had swept across his mind that the course of his love was too uneventful, too fair, too unruffled. His feelings of vague discontent and longing for more excitement had really been but the merest ripple upon the calm surface of his life. But now in the shipwreck of his happiness he looked back, reproaching himself. Were there envious Fates, then, who overruled man's destiny to his own destruction, and because he may have sighed for a slight breeze took hellish delight in sending a hurricane to dash him upon the rocks and shatter him to pieces? Surely this was a pagan notion that no man now could hold for true, but in times past there must have been bitter experiences of such sudden shifts of fortune to make men set up the idea that they must propitiate the Fates by the sacrifice of something valuable. Yet in the very telling of the story of such sacrifice its uselessness was impressed upon the hearer. Polycrates couldn't save himself. Fate hurled back his priceless ring, determined to be revenged on him in more direful ways for his too great happiness and good fortune. So it was with Heaton to-day. Man has learned much, but not how to save himself from the strokes of ill fortune that seem to be stored up and held in readiness for all time. The most that philosophy or religion can teach is simply either to endure with fortitude or to bow the head in humility. Man's life track is marked out beforehand for him, but marked with clumsy disregard of the fate of him who has to travel it. There are no danger signals up nor beacon lights burning at the deadly turning points—

nothing to show him where lies the hidden danger, the after-effects of which will be so terrible. He is bidden follow the track in blind helplessness, often, no doubt, passing close to perils that would have been fatal, only he slipped unconsciously by just on the safe side, but sometimes falling a victim because, just as unconsciously, he veered to the danger side. The dividing line is so narrow that none can see it, and so mankind in blindness, but ever in hope, pursues his course along the track of life, where many, long before the goal is reached, stumble and fall to rise no more.

Thus musing on his own fate Heaton rode up to the bars, where he was roused from his gloomy meditations by the two young darkies Pete and Moses, who ran out to take his horse. They were accustomed to his silence, doubly accentuated during this season of mourning and doubt, but they glanced at him curiously, for with the sharpness of slaves, who are wont to read every look in their master's face and to shape their course accordingly, they perceived, as it were, an added line of sternness about his mouth.

"Tell Sambo to get out the wagon and the brown horses. I am going into Tecumseh again to-day, and I shall want him to bring home the wagon. I'm not coming back any more," said Heaton as he gave his bridle rein to Pete.

"Whar yo' gwine, mas'r?" asked Moses, venturing upon the extreme audacity of a direct question, since the extraordinary circumstances seemed to warrant liberties being taken.

"I'm going to the war, to be killed most likely," answered Heaton bitterly.

The young darkies instantly set up a lugubrious howl, not unmelodious in the distance, their official signal of grief, much resorted to by negroes on the occasion of a death. Heaton walked away to his cabin to

make his rapid preparations and to write a letter of farewell to Nancy. The news of his departure and the object of his going soon became known, and a vast amount of howling resulted, for the negroes felt in duty bound to mourn for the "mas'r." They could not forget the absolute justice and unvarying kindness with which he had always treated them. Very soon their native desire to make a song and a dance of everything began to assert itself. Words slipped into the howlings, which became more musical. The tendency to chant their emotions and dance to them is indicative of a very primitive stage of human development. The idea clashes with our notions of what is seemly, because we have relegated singing and dancing, especially dancing, only to moments of the most frivolous leisure, but among the ruder races of mankind dancing and singing hold quite another position. The dancing dervishes are far from being animated by frivolity, and the Irish peasant's keen at a funeral is a sign of deep woe. The keen, or melodious howl in a minor key, fittingly expresses their grief at the death of their beloved one. It strikes us as uncouth, because it is not the custom for the rigid self-contained Anglo-Saxon to howl with anything but rage.

The negroes perhaps brought their mournful death cadences with them from Africa, and nothing that has taken place in their history from that time forward is sufficiently exhilarating to cause them to change their songs into a major key. I know of no sound more laden with sorrow and mourning than that of real negroes singing their real songs. These songs are rude and violate every rule known to our rhymesters, but they carry a burden of sadness in their cadence which would make the reputation of half a dozen poets could they incorporate it into their carefully polished elegies.

"Is there any one dying among the negroes that

they sing like that?" asked Nancy, hearing the wailing and recognising it as a sign of woe.

"No, Miss Nancy, dar ain't no nigga dyin' dish time. Dey's on'y singin' de good-bye song fo' Mas'r Charlie. He's gwine off to de war, an' he won't nebber come back no mo'. He's gwine ter lay down his life fo' de niggas an' free de slaves."

Aunt Monin had no authority for any of these statements except of course that Heaton had volunteered for a soldier, but she was a strong partisan, and her affection for "Mas'r Charlie" prompted her to place him in the most affecting light possible.

"Oh, not yet, not now!" exclaimed Nancy, suddenly brought face to face with the thought that Heaton was going from her, and that she would see him no more.

"Yes, Miss Nancy, he's gwine for shu'. Sambo done hitch up de brown hosses in de wagon for ter take him 'way to die."

This was pure hyperbole, but Nancy did not wait to reason. All her love rose up in her heart, overwhelming every other recollection. Charlie was going off to the wars, and she loved him so.

Ah, me! In those years how many times in every village, in every State, was the same tragedy repeated! Soldiers going away amid hurried farewells, and broken-hearted girls sobbing out their hearts for the lovers who might never come back to them.

The negroes who were clustering around the wagon and talking to Sambo were startled by the sudden flash of Nancy, who sped past them, her dark hair streaming down her back, her black eyes glittering unnaturally in her white face. She went straight from her door to Heaton's little cabin and entered breathless. He had finished his brief letter to her, and was standing up putting on his cartridge belt when, without a note of warning, Nancy came in.

It was not a moment for words. Their hearts were too full for that slow and imperfect medium of communication. Instinctively they fell back upon Nature's simple language. Nancy threw herself sobbing upon Heaton's bosom, and he clasped her in his arms, kissing her dark hair. After some moments she raised her tearful eyes and said under her breath, "Are you really going, Charlie?"

"Yes, dearest. It is best so. It is my expiation. If I come back, will you forgive me by and bye? If I never come back, will you forgive me now?"

There was forgiveness, there was despair, in the cry with which Nancy again threw her arms around his neck and laid her soft cheek against the cartridges and pressed those destructive objects into her tender flesh. Heaton patted the quivering form and in a choking voice tried to comfort her, but what comfort was possible at such a moment? So she laid her head down and wept, as hundreds of others were weeping that night and clinging around their lovers' necks in an agony of hopeless despair.

"De wagon's ready, mas'r, an' de hosses is stompin' der hoofs off," said Sambo, poking his black face in through the door.

"Send Aunt Monin here," said Heaton, not daring to leave poor Nancy alone in the supreme moment of her despair.

The old woman came quickly enough. Her loving heart told her why she was wanted.

"Take care of her, Aunt Monin," said he, putting Nancy into the arms that had sheltered her since babyhood.

"Honey-chile, trust in de Lo'd dat he watch over Mas'r Charlie in de midst o' de roar o' de battle. Pray to de Lo'd, chile."

Nancy knelt, burying her face in her hands in silent

misery; her dark hair fell around her as a veil. The old negress, standing over her, raised her wrinkled face upward and, stretching out her hands, said:

“Lo’d, have mercy ’pon all those in sorrow an’ ’fliction an’ comfort der hearts.”

“Amen!” said Heaton as he softly left the room. And that was the last image of Nancy that he carried away with him to the war, the image of her kneeling at her nurse’s feet, with her dark hair shading her face and her form vibrating with sobs.

The negroes broke out afresh in their wailing as the wagon moved off. It was their farewell.

“Mas’r done gone to de war,
He nebber come back no mo’,
An’ de tree frog sing on his grave,
’Way down in ole Virginny, oh!”

The rise and fall of the cadence could still be heard long after Heaton had got beyond the reach of the very lugubrious dirge which sent quite a shiver of foreboding over him.

CHAPTER XVII

BUSHWHACKERS

THAT same spring month which saw the rebellion begin on the banks of the Potomac let loose the dogs of war all along the Missouri line. War indeed had existed in a spasmodic form for full five years or more, but it was not called by that name; and the raids on one side and the other were extolled or decried according to the bias of the people engaged in them or of the sufferers from them. Such a training made very relentless soldiers when the time came to give the raiders on both sides that title. Quiet settlers on the border abandoned their farms, for Missouri was just on the dividing line between North and South, and while the northern half of it remained in the Union, the southern portion sympathized with the secession States. According as the fortune of war swayed and changed, so the line of demarcation was pushed farther up toward St. Louis or was rolled back to Arkansas. Such a land was no place for peaceful farming folk; it was much too disturbed for them. Men don't care to plant corn, if the field is to be used for a battle ground, to be ridden over by the living and cumbered by the dead, when the crop is half grown. Nor do they relish raising horses, if they are likely to be taken when old enough for the saddle, even if paid a good price for them in worthless Confederate paper. Thus the rich land near the line became deserted by men, and the deer roamed in and rested

beneath the shade of peach trees heavy laden with velvet fruit which no one was there to gather. The hogs, too, let loose out of their once narrow pens, got thin from lack of fattening food, but the sinews of their legs resumed power to move their bodies once more, and swift as the flight of a hound was the rush of the black bristling hogs crashing through the tangled underwood. They enjoyed the peaches and drove out the deer with many a grunt of deep satisfaction as they munched up the fallen fruit, extracting the last invigorating whiff of prussic acid from out the cracked stone before swallowing it. Oh, those were gay times for the hogs down in Missouri when the farmers had fled and left their orchards to the swine! But it was less cheerful after the first frost had sent down the shower of shrivelled and sweet-tasting persimmons, too soon to be devoured, leaving nothing behind but frozen ground and acorns lying under the leaves. Then the hogs had to root and burrow and toil from morn till night to get food, and all the while they got thinner and thinner, and the sinews of their legs stood out like whipcord. They had not much weight to carry, but their weak legs were not able for the lightened load. So, wondering perchance at the change that had come over the world, now all cornless for them, the hogs rooted away in the woods and got lankier day by day.

Along with the deer and the hogs another class of creatures arose and swarmed upon the Missouri line. These were the "bushwhackers," a name full of meaning that needs little elucidation. When society comes to the boil there is a lot of scum that rises to the top. The bushwhackers were the Missouri scum. Bands of reckless men under a yet more reckless leader used to collect and dash across the line into Kansas to catch runaway negroes and do whatever damage they could to those who protected or harboured the escaped slaves.

It was the counter-blast to the Jay-Hawkers, and the last effort of expiring slavery.

Among the leaders who made for themselves a name in this wild warfare none was better known and none more justly feared than the border ruffian Quantrell. He came from no one knew where, and he went no one knew whither, but he left always a broad trail of burning houses behind him to show his path in Kansas. Winter and summer, day and night, sometimes in the north near Kansas City, sometimes as far down as Fort Scott, Quantrell was known to lead his furious raids, gathering up negroes and destroying houses as he passed. He never ill used the women or molested young children—that is white women and children, but he had a short sharp way with men, even white ones, which often ended with a rifle bullet. He rapidly built up a reputation for dare-devil bravery, which, combined with his severity, soon made his name a terror to all within reach, and one never knew how far his reach might eventually extend. At first he confined himself to operations within a day's ride of the line, but as his fame spread and the number of his followers increased he extended the area of his influence. No one within twenty miles of the line dared call himself safe.

The tales of Quantrell and his doings spread far over the land, and assuredly lost nothing on the way in the telling. At the first hint that he might be near the negroes took to the woods in every direction, remaining for days together cowering down under the brushwood, for no negro who had ever looked on the great bushwhacker's face had come back to tell what Quantrell was like. If he could not carry off or drive the negroes before him back into slavery he would deliberately shoot them. Never, under any circumstances, did he leave a free negro behind him, and few were those who managed to escape out of his clutches once he headed

them toward Missouri. Small wonder, therefore, if they dreaded him as the chicken dreads the hawk, and that they should, like frightened chickens, flee under cover at the first hint of his presence in their neighbourhood.

The name and fame of Quantrell had, of course, reached Carthage, and the little colony of negroes who lived there under Nancy's sheltering wing; but they felt secure in the distance which separated them from Missouri. When Nancy heard accounts of how he had swooped down and carried off negroes from near Lawrence itself, and taken them away from the midst of a determined and well-armed free-state population, she blessed the lucky chance which had brought her and them to Carthage far out of harm's way. Whenever the negroes came to tell her of some fresh raid, which very certainly lost nothing in dramatic horror on passing through their minds, Nancy would always say at the end of the recital how thankful she was that they had Lawrence between them and harm, and were safe.

The negroes themselves, however, did not feel the same sense of security. Their lives were one long dread and terror for fear of being caught and brought back into Missouri. Many a time as they sat around their fire roasting their ears of corn for supper they would talk over the chances and alarms of a raid. The subject seemed to have a fascination for them.

“ Yo’, Sambo, whar’l yo’ hide when de bushwhackers come ’long hyar? ” Pete would ask, with his beady eyes fixed on his own ear of corn for fear that Moses might grab it, under the impression that it was a better one than his or was in a more favourable place for being thoroughly roasted without burning.

“ Dish nigga ain’t agwine ter hide, ” Sambo replied with stern scorn.

“ Whar yo’ gwine ter git then? ”

"I'se gwine ter fight," Sambo answered with a thump on his chest, rolling his eyes until the whites showed all around. This mightily pleased the small darkies, who admired nothing so much as courage, of which they themselves never exhibited a trace at any moment in their lives. M'linder admired it, too, for whose sole benefit, if the truth be told, Sambo was thus boasting.

"La, Sambo, yo' ain't got no gun; yo' can't fight nohow," M'linder said, belittling his valour. M'linder was quite aware of Sambo's admiration, but loved to appear to deprecate his prowess, a peculiarity often observed in women, whatever may happen to be the colour of their skin.

"I kin fight 'thout ary gun. Thar ain't nothin' I can't fight with," replied Sambo boastfully, "when I'se got ladies ter defen'."

"Lawk, how yo' does run 'long!" said M'linder, hardly able to conceal her admiration for the hero.

"I jess take chunk o' wood an' bust Quantrell's head off kerflop," exclaimed Pete, excited by all this talk.

"Yah, yo' go 'long!" exclaimed Aunt Monin scornfully. "Young rooster make mo' racket an' crowin' dan de hen dat lay de egg, but de ole woman don' nebber go ter look whar he's bin a-settin'."

Pete subsided under the laugh called up by this rebuke.

"If Mas'r Heaton he bin hyar, he done build up a fort an' bring de sojers," remarked Moses, who had seen some in Tecumseh once and had never recovered from the amazement which their shiny swords had created in his mind.

"Yo' shet yer mouf; yo' dunno nuffin 'bout sojers an' forts an' fightin'," observed Sambo, anxious to monopolize the talk as well as the admiration of the circle.

“I’se gwine ter sharpen de ole axe mighty sharp an’ grin’ it to de razor edge on de grin’stone.”

“What fo’?” asked Pete.

Sambo looked scornfully at him and remained contemptuously silent.

“Speck yo’ gwine ter chop off de head o’ ole man Quantrell,” said M’linder exultingly.

Sambo, as became a great hero, said nothing to this flattering assumption, but pulled his ear of corn from before the fire, rubbed a sprinkle of salt into the long luscious rows of grains, and began thoughtfully to gnaw at it with his strong white teeth. This was the signal for all the other negroes to begin, and nothing was heard but the grinding of their powerful teeth, much as if they had been a lot of black ponies at a feed of corn.

The slow year dragged wearily along at Carthage, and never since the day when he had closed the door on her, kneeling at Aunt Monin’s feet, had Heaton sent a word to Nancy. She did not know whether he was dead or alive. She did not even know where he had gone. She read the papers with eagerness, and followed the lists of killed, wounded, and missing according as they appeared after the various battles; at first with many a heartache, wondering what was the history of different ones whose names for some reason or other struck her fancy, but soon this feeling wore off. She had no more sorrow to expend vaguely on names that carried no personal image with them. Her heart used to beat wildly when she came across the name of Heaton, as she did more than once, even when coupled with initials not belonging to the one whose fate so deeply interested her. Once she read among the list of wounded, “Captain Charles Heaton, slightly,” and in the next list he appeared as severely wounded, and she at once made up her mind that it was Charlie, and that he was going to die.

Of course Nancy talked to Aunt Monin about this new cause of grief. She talked to her about everything. She was the one companion the young girl had, but nothing that she could say was likely to upset the old woman's firm convictions on this subject.

"Mas'r Charlie warn't agwine ter die. He was gwine ter come back to 'em. 'Cause why? He was 'p'intaed to save Miss Nancy, like he done save 'em all in de snow in de winter time."

When Aunt Monin had once adopted a particular theory of life as an article of her faith, as in the case of other teachers greater than she, it was impossible to make her give any heed to anything that seemed to conflict with her theories. She had made up her mind on the subject of Heaton's return, and was unvarying in her steadfast belief. In her secret heart Nancy got a great deal of consolation out of this positiveness of conviction, and used frequently to say things in order to draw from Aunt Monin a renewed expression of her belief that "Mas'r Charlie was coming home soon as de wa' over."

"When Mas'r Charlie come home from de wa', he'll be mad dat de ole fence roun' de paster ain't men'ed up," she would say when her eagle eye detected a fence rail broken or thrown down. "Mas'r Charlie he powerful 'tickler, an' have his fence mighty peart an' strong, dat he is, fo' shu'."

Observations like these were a great comfort to Nancy and seemed to put new life and hope into her. Aunt Monin's love for her honey-chile had taught her how best to comfort and console her during these long weary months of anxiety and loneliness.

The cabin which Heaton had made use of for his dwelling place had remained unoccupied since he left. Nancy could not bear to let the negroes have it, so it remained locked up, and she kept the key. It contained nothing except a few of his old coats, which still hung

on pegs against the wall. The meagre furniture Nancy had removed into her own house. Aunt Monin objected to this empty house remaining unused. When the rats got into the cornerib she suggested that the meal bins, at all events, should be put into that cabin, for then the dog could be shut up with them, and he would soon make a clearance of the rats. This was accordingly done, and Nancy still kept the key in her possession, all the more necessary now since it didn't do to let negroes have the run of any food, even if it were only corn meal; they were so wastefully extravagant whenever there was plenty.

Somewhere toward the end of a very hot August John P. Ridgway, who had been doing a thriving business in the matter of selling cavalry horses to the Federal Government, found himself at Tecumseh, and, remembering his friends at Carthage, thought he would look them up. He had heard nothing of them since some time in the spring, when Heaton had written to him about the coming marriage, and he had sent a cordial letter of felicitation in reply. Riding up to the bars on the afternoon in question, he was pleased to see Nancy standing in her doorway, much the same as he had seen her stand on that winter's night six months before. He came forward with a bright smile, and said, in a loud and hearty voice:

“ Well, Mrs. Heaton, howdy? Getting 'long pretty spry, eh? ”

Nancy blushed painfully up to the roots of her hair and retreated back a step or two, without making any reply to this salutation.

Ridgway saw that he had made some mistake, but he was a man of not very delicate feeling, so he continued, not one whit abashed:

“ Old man dead? Is he? Dear, dear, I am sorry, so I am.”

"Mas'r Charlie done volunteer fo' de wa' long while back, mas'r. We dunno whar he be, an' Miss Nancy Overton she done live hyar an' run de farm all by herse'f," said Aunt Monin, coming to the rescue of a somewhat difficult situation. Ridgway gave a prolonged whistle, then a good stare at Nancy, watching the rich colour die slowly out of her face, leaving it somewhat wan and pale looking.

"Well, I swan!" he ejaculated after a few moments' profound meditation. "He wasn't so sot on fighting as that. I never should have guessed he'd been the one to volunteer, anyhow."

"Why not?" asked Nancy quickly. "He was the first man to respond to the call in this neighbourhood." There was a ring of exultation in her voice that did not escape her visitor.

"Do tell! Then he's gone for the three years' enlistment, you bet. The ninety-day men are back a good while. Some of 'em got enough of fighting in their ninety days, I can tell you."

"Mr. Heaton will not come back until the war is over, and this sinful blot of slavery wiped off the land," said Nancy.

Ridgway looked at her narrowly from between his half-closed eyelids.

"Going to wait for him?" he inquired slowly.

"Yes, I am going to wait for him till he comes back," said Nancy, meeting the look unflinchingly and replying to the unmistakable meaning of his question in an unmistakable manner.

"And if he don't never come back? Folks do get killed in war, you know," continued Ridgway, still looking at her in the same intent way.

"Then I'll wait for him all my life, and we shall meet beyond the grave," replied Nancy with deep earnest voice.

“ Well, I swan! ” said Ridgway, after which he relapsed into silence for some time. “ What beats me is why the blamed coon volunteered,” he remarked at length in a tone of puzzled commiseration. “ He warn’t fond of fighting I know for certain. Charlie Heaton warn’t tough enough for that kind o’ work. He had a heap o’ notions ’bout right and wrong and justice and such like fooling. Notions only gets in a man’s way when he’s a soldier; when there’s fighting work to be done he’d better get shut o’ poetry and fine ideas, I can tell you. Charlie never could do that. He was a powerful soft-hearted fellow for a Kansas man. I never see his beat for that. There was a fellow down in Missouri he killed in a raid. All fair and square, you know—killed him in front, as a gentleman should; no sneaking round from behind a tree. And t’other fellow had a gun too, only he warn’t quick enough to get the drop on him. Well, you wouldn’t believe, Miss Overton, but that soft-hearted boy was always thinking about that shooting and grieving over it. He told me the whole story one night when we were out buffalo hunting together, and I did laugh, I can tell you. The idea of such a little thing as that coming into a fellow’s head and making him uneasy! Queer, warn’t it? ”

When Ridgway looked around for Nancy’s answer he found, to his surprise, that she had left the room. She must have slipped away when he was laughing at the recollection of Heaton’s absurd notions. Aunt Monin came to say that her young mistress was suddenly seized with faintness, and that she could not see him again. The young man was sincerely sorry to hear this, and left many messages of commiseration with the old negress when he rode away. He was sorely puzzled at the position of affairs at Carthage, and when he had reached the rising ground from which he had looked around him in the winter and commented upon Heaton’s

remarkable cuteness he again pulled up and surveyed the scene thoughtfully.

“Volunteered in his wedding week. The dog-gauned cuss!” he observed. Then, after a long look around he added: “And she’s going to wait for him. The darned fools, both!”

With that he rode off to Tecumseh to see after his cavalry colts.

CHAPTER XVIII

DELENDÄ EST CARTHAGO!

THE years of the war were long, long years. It would be hard to say whether the hours dragged more slowly for those left at home, living their lives in anxious suspense, or for the men at the front, with the dangers and fierce excitements of battle alternating with the drudgery of camp life and the suffering of the hospital tent. War as seen from afar is mainly a series of pictorial effects in illustrated newspapers, finished off by the triumphant return of the battered battalions, more glorious and popular in their rags than in the finest parade smartness of a birthday review. War, as seen at first hand, presents a very different aspect. Happily, no imagination is vivid enough to make us realize an actual battle, or even the details of a slight skirmish. The first sight of even the merest fringe of war is such as to leave an impression that nothing will ever afterward efface. The coldest heart that ever pulsated beats quicker at the sight of a regiment marching to the front. There they go bravely forward, following their flag and their music with bright eyes gleaming and heads erect. Poor atoms in a regiment, how many of you will ever come back? And if you do, will your eyes then be bright and your gallant heads erect? No. You will crawl home, many of you, poor maimed creatures with the vigour of manhood forever crushed out.

The war of the secession was a long, fierce struggle,

lasting over months and years. It was none of those campaigns of a few weeks which nowadays are sometimes called wars. It was of the old-fashioned fighting kind of war, when men met in mortal combat. It was a bloody war, for both sides fought with courage and determination. The South sent up its men in thousands until there were none left but old ones at home; and the North sent down its men in thousands, having plenty more to draw from. There was an endless procession of young manhood converging on Richmond for years and years, and of that procession only very few ever got safely home again. Richmond was like a furnace, said a Southern mother, a roaring, raging furnace, and the young men were hurled into it like logs of wood; and out of that furnace, when the great conflagration was over, there came forth but a few ashes.

There was no spot in all the wide area of the United States so remote or so secluded that it could hide itself away from the war. If, happily, it was far enough removed from Mason and Dixon's line to be forever beyond sound of trumpet call and rifle shot, at least there were within its borders hearts that throbbed with anxious love for those at the front. Every village and hamlet, nay, almost every house, was in direct communication with the army by the universal connecting telegraph of human love. After every battle and every skirmish, how those poor human telegraph threads throbbed with the anguish of palpitating anxiety, or too often with the certainty of hopeless despair!

Carthage, away off on the rolling prairie, far from any neighbour, set down there in the midst of wild untrammelled Nature—Carthage too had its private wire to the front, along which Nancy's heartaches used to pulsate, as she nightly prayed for that dear life which was more than all the world to her, and which had been

offered up for her country's sake. Yet all the while life seemed to flow smoothly forward for Nancy and her little colony of negroes. At last she began to see that as far as material success was concerned she was succeeding. Two whole years had elapsed since Charlie Heaton had gone away. It was spring again, and Nancy was full of the manifold duties of getting forward with her crop. She understood more about work now. She had turned the corner of her difficulties. For two years her seed sowings had been blessed with bountiful harvestings, and now the rich purple prairie soil turned up broad acres of ploughed land to the life-giving rays of the warm spring sunshine. Nothing had begun to sprout as yet, but there was a sense of growing in the very air. The first great bluebottle fly had buzzed around Nancy as she stood in the south doorway, basking in the genial warmth of the sun. She welcomed him and rejoiced over his cheerful buzz. One fly is welcome as a harbinger of spring. When they come in batches of a million and a half at a time the welcome, which would have been cordial if concentrated upon a single individual, does not suffice to go round.

It was on one of these warm spring days, when the air was soft and the prairie had just begun to clothe itself in tender green, that Nancy was returning home from a neighbour's farm some ten miles away to the west of her house. She had been to get some water-melon seeds of a kind warranted to thrive in a dry country, which she intended to plant in generous profusion for the benefit of the negroes, who revel in water-melons. The days was bright and clear, and, as the sun was at her back, it being already late in the afternoon, she was able to see with singular distinctness. Her house stood high up on the open prairie, unshadowed by a single tree, and was visible for miles around. As she rode along, Nancy became aware, when still some

three miles off, that there was a certain amount of movement around the buildings. Dim shadows appeared to traverse the brightness of the house where the sun shone full upon the western side. Nancy, like all healthy Western girls, had keen sight. Her black eyes were not troubled by following the crooked and crabbed outlines of print, nor did sitting up late tend to dim their brightness. Therefore, as she rode homeward she amused herself by scrutinizing the houses carefully, trying to make out what was going forward during her absence. What puzzled her most was an occasional bright flash, as if some child were whisking about a looking-glass or somebody were kicking about tin milk pans upon which the sun was beaming steadily. She could not make it out. The flashings became brighter and more puzzling the longer she looked at them.

At length she pulled up and took a steady sight. Yes, there were undoubtedly a number of persons moving about casting the puzzling shadows. She was vexed. It was unpardonable of the negroes to leave their work and prance about like that just because her back was turned. She felt incensed at their dishonest laziness; they had learned some of the virtues of freedom by this time, and should know better. She rode smartly forward for half a mile and then stopped once more. The moving figures were not negroes. They were men on horseback, and in great numbers, too. The flashings must be from rifle barrels or swords. Nothing but steel flashed back the sun's level rays in so vivid a manner.

Soldiers! What were they doing at her house? Nancy wondered, and again rode forward. The movement ceased around the house. A black mass was collecting at the bars. Somehow they didn't give the impression of soldiers. There seemed too much of a helter-skelter confusion for the movements of trained troops.

They were riding away. That was just as well. Nancy slackened her speed. She did not particularly care to meet a band of soldiers. Sometimes they were noisy and not especially under control, as, for instance, that unruly Irish regiment encamped east of Tecumseh. So she loitered along in order to let the men get clear away before she returned. She would hear all about the visit from Aunt Monin and the rest the moment she got back.

Suddenly she started in her saddle. What was that? Columns of blue curling smoke rising from among the corn stacks, eddying over the hayrick, and issuing from the windows of her house.

Nancy laid her rawhide whip across her horse's flank and rode madly toward the house. The blue columns got thicker and thicker, belching upward toward the sky in heavy spiral masses. Fast and furiously as she rode, however, the flames were quicker than she was. By the time she got to the bars the flames were curling up forty feet over her corn stacks and the wicked red tongues were licking the lintel of the kitchen door, while the stable and henhouse were both alight, the maddened fowls flying with croaks of terror before the fierce blaze.

Not a soul was to be seen, and no sound but the roaring of the flames. Her frightened horse refused to pass the bars and snorted loudly at the fearful sight. Tying him hurriedly to the fence, Nancy rushed to the cabins, which showed as yet no signs of fire. The first she went to was Charlie Heaton's long vacant house. The door was burst open, and a pile of shucks and straw in the middle of the floor showed that the enemy had been at work there too. The cornshucks had been set on fire, but there being nothing else for them to burn they had gone out, leaving only a blackened heap of smouldering ashes behind. These Nancy scattered and stamped out with her feet; then she went to the next cabin, but there

she was met by a burst of flame. The work had been more thoroughly done, because the kindling fire of corn-shucks had been supplemented by the clothes and furniture and bedding in the house. The cabins were all alight, while the air was full of flying, burning fluff from the hay and corn stacks. She could not stay in Heaton's cabin on account of the suffocating smoke which collected in it. She was driven to take refuge in the newly ploughed field. The sun sank below the western horizon, and the darkening evening sky was lighted up by the glare of the burning buildings.

Hour after hour, all through that spring night, Nancy sat in the cornfield, watching her home burn itself out to the last cinder. The only building that remained standing was Heaton's little cabin, and into this she crept in the gray hours of the morning, shivering with cold and the exhaustion of those hours of melancholy watching. She huddled Heaton's old working coat around herself and lay down on the floor, where, in sheer misery, she cried herself to sleep amid the blackened ruins of her house and home. Hours afterward she was aroused by hearing voices. Frightened at the thought of human beings near her, she crept to the window and peeped out. A couple of men stood there, whom she recognised as settlers from beyond the creek. Accordingly, she ventured forth from her hiding place.

“By gosh! be that you, Miss Overton? We 'lowed Quantrell hed lit out with the whole on yer.”

“I suppose it was Quantrell,” said Nancy wearily.

“You may lay it were that same. Thar ain't nary 'nother 'ud do such a sight o' burnin' as him. Thar's a broad trail o' burnin' 'hind him, anyhow. The all-fired cuss has lighted a heap o' houses the whole way down to the Missouri line.”

“All my negroes are gone too,” said Nancy with a shiver. “Not one is left, not even old Aunt Monin.”

She fairly broke down and sobbed aloud. The men looked very sorrowful.

“We’ll hev to riz up an’ hang every man in Missouri as far as the Osage,” said one of the men, by way of offering the comfort of revenge to Nancy. “This hyar sort o’ cavortin’ roun’ an’ burnin’ out folks hes got ter be shut down.”

“There are soldiers in Tecumseh and Topeka; why didn’t they stop Quantrell?” asked Nancy, with the ignorance of a woman.

“Sojers,” observed one of the men, Wilson by name, “ain’t much good for catching bushwhackers. They’re sorter slow an’ solemn ter ride with. They ain’t spry ‘nough for that kinder work, an’ they hes ter git counted an’ mounted satisfact’ry, an’ a heap o’ foolin’ hes ter be gone through ‘fore they’re ready ter begin. For ter catch up with bushwhackers you hes ter be mighty limber, an’ ready ter jump inter yer saddle an’ sling up yer rifle quick as a cat can wink her eye.”

“You bet that’s how it’ll have to be done, if it ever is done,” assented his companion. “This here farm is ‘most busted up, marm. I don’t calc’late you’ll be ‘lowing to stay this ways any more.”

“I don’t know what to do. I haven’t a friend that I can go to in all the world, and no money now. Everything is gone,” said Nancy piteously, her great eyes full of tears.

Poor child, it was hard after all her brave attempts to do her duty! Destiny was too strong for her; she must give up. She grieved for the destruction of her home, around which her heart had begun to twine in affectionate interest, but what she felt most deeply was the fate of her negroes. She had sacrificed everything in order to free them and to do what she could to restore to them the boon of freedom from which they had been so long debarred, and now, just as success seemed

to crown her efforts, came this crushing blow. They were torn away from her by a band of robbers who would exult in their sufferings. They were now in the hands of the most relentless enemies of their race, and she who had loved them so well was powerless to save them.

Wilson and his companion tried hard to induce Nancy to leave the blackened ruins of her home and come away at once with them. Each in turn offered her his own horse to ride, declaring he could walk easy enough. She decided to remain one day there, however, taking shelter in the one cabin that was left among the ruins of Carthage. She said that perhaps her horse would come back, and that she wanted to be there to catch him. She referred, of course, to the one she had tied to the bars the evening before, but who had broken loose and run off in terror at the flames. She said she hoped the horse would come back, but what she really hoped was that possibly some of the negroes might manage to escape from their captors, in which case they would be sure to make for Carthage, and she wanted to be there to receive them. It was a foolish, unreasoning hope, but she could not resign herself all in a moment to the bitter thought of losing Aunt Monin forever. The two settlers left her regretfully after doing what little they could to make her comfortable. They made a fire for her—there was plenty of charred timber about—and saw that she could make herself some bread, there being some meal left in the bins. This done, they took their departure, Wilson promising to come for her with his wagon the very next day, when she would have to come home with him no matter whether the horse had returned or not. He was a poor man, a struggling Western settler with few cattle and a large family, but he told Nancy she was welcome to come and stay at his house a year if she liked. When real affliction over-

takes one there is nothing can exceed the sterling kindness of a prairie settler. There is no passing by on the other side on the prairie. When a traveller has fallen among thieves the next man that comes along offers him help with the best heart and the worst grammar possible.

Nancy slept that night on the floor of Heaton's cabin, covered by one of his old coats. In the middle of the night her somewhat nervous slumbers were broken by the sound of a wailing voice. It was a wild, unearthly sound, and Nancy started up full of alarm in a moment. Everything she had ever heard of in the way of terrors, natural or supernatural, rushed into her mind with exceeding clearness. Indeed, she was in a sufficiently helpless and unprotected state to warrant her feeling uncomfortable at the thought of there being strange persons about. She was absolutely alone, half a dozen miles from the nearest neighbour, and without even a horse to carry her into safety by flight. She repented of her determination to wait for her negroes at Carthage. Why had she been so mad as to stay here in this deserted cabin? Why had she not gone away with Wilson into safety while yet there was time? Her heart thumped in her throat. She felt like shrieking aloud from very terror, but she managed to check the mad impulse to do so. She buried her head in Heaton's coat and kissed the rough material in memory of the brave heart that once beat under its homely folds.

O Charlie, Charlie, if only you were here now to defend her!

The wailing cry came distinctly nearer. It could not possibly proceed from an animal, for it made articulate sounds. Nancy crept out of her cabin, for it seemed less dreadful to meet the thing, whatever it was, in the open than to be caught in a trap in the house. She held the coat tightly around her to try and smother

the chattering of her teeth, which seemed to her to clatter like a sawmill.

A dark shape flitted among the shadowy heaps of blackened ruins. That much she could distinguish in the starlight, and the crackle of the cinders, as it moved among the charred beams of the houses, proved to her that it was not a diseased fancy of her overwrought brain.

By and bye the phantom came near to the cabin, under the wall of which Nancy was cowering in the shadow. It went in, and all was silent. Each moment she expected to behold some horrid phantasm; she hardly knew what she most feared, but something still more dreadful than the dim and uncertain terror that was chilling her heart's blood. A murmuring sound came from the cabin, at first faint and indistinct, like the distant sough of wind in the pine trees. Then this changed into a woman's droning voice singing over and over the same words:

“Mas'r Charlie done gone ter de war,
We won't nebber see him no mo'
De tree frog sing on his grave,
'Way done in ole Virginny, oh!”

Nancy knew that chant well enough, because ever since Heaton went away the negroes were in the habit of singing it every now and then, particularly after hearing that there had been a battle anywhere in which he might be presumed to have been engaged. Evidently here was one of her negroes back again, and instead of welcoming her with joy, Nancy was shivering with fright outside the house.

“Is that you, Melinda?” asked the young girl, going to the door and waiting at the threshold. The singer instantly stopped her song on hearing herself addressed, but did not reply. This puzzled Nancy, but when the

doeful ditty was immediately resumed she concluded it was the crazy mulatto woman.

“Susannah, where have you come from?” she asked in the hope of learning something about the rest of the negroes.

“O Susannah, don’t yer cry,” was all the answer she got, and this being a well-known revival hymn did not advance matters much further toward a mutual understanding.

Guided by the voice, she groped her way to where the woman sat crooning to herself, and laid her hand on the face of the singer, but beyond kissing the hand she made no reply. The young girl nestled up to the woman, deriving comfort from the companionship of even a crazy negress, so lonely and desolate was she. She longed to get some information from her concerning the fate of the others, but, knowing from experience how useless would be the attempt, she sat silent until the singer grew tired of the sound of her own voice.

“Where’s Aunt Monin?” she asked suddenly in the hope of rousing the torpid brain. The effect was not what she had anticipated. The answer came at once, clear and unfaltering, in Aunt Monin’s own voice and words:

“Honey-chile, don’t yo’ go for ter ’sgress ’gin de will o’ de Lo’d. Yo’ bide de time o’ de Lo’d an’ wait in ’mility for de day o’ grace.” Nancy was electrified, and starting up she said, eagerly: “Aunt Monin, is it you? Tell me. Tell your own chile is it you, or is it a spirit come to mock me?” She was in the greatest distress and agitation. Her companion, however, took not the slightest notice of her, but began again to wail that dirge about Mas’r Charlie and his grave. This was too much for Nancy’s overstrained nerves; she sobbed aloud. The eerie singer took no notice, but

wailed and sang, and sang and wailed the whole of the night.

At the first streak of dawn Nancy pulled her out into the open air to examine her features, for the similarity of voice and expression had been so bewilderingly like Aunt Monin that she could not feel sure which of the two had come back to her through the darkness and the night. Aunt Monin was jet black, and would not have been visible at all in the faint morning light, so when Nancy discerned a face before her she knew it was the mulatto woman, whose yellow features were already becoming visible.

“Susannah, why do you talk like Aunt Monin?” she asked sternly.

“Jess put yer trus’ in de Lo’d. He guide yo’ outer de lan’ o’ wil’erness an’ ’struction. Look befo’ yo’, honey-chile, in hope an’ faith, an’ don’ nebber look be-hin’,” answered Susannah, but the imitation, though still remarkable, was less startling than in the dark, when it appeared to Nancy like magic. The name of Aunt Monin seemed to have the power of projecting some of her thoughts and expressions on poor Susannah’s confused brain, for whenever Nancy repeated it to her she was sure to say something similar to what Aunt Monin used to say upon all and every occasion. As for giving the faintest clew about what had happened, she was totally unable to do so.

“Is Aunt Monin gone?” asked Nancy, hoping to gather some crumbs of information from the outburst the name would cause.

“I’se gwine down inter Egyp’, inter de lan’ o’ bond-age, an’ my eyes sha’n’t nebber see de honey-chile no mo’, but de han’ o’ de Lo’d ’stain her an’ pertec’ her in de hours o’ ’fliction,” replied Susannah, and Nancy wept.

The sun rose unclouded over the heap of blackened

ruins where once had stood Carthage, and in the distance across the twinkling dewy grass came a white-covered wagon shining in the morning light. It was Wilson, who started before dawn to come and fetch Nancy to where she would be safe among friends.

CHAPTER XIX

SLAVE DRIVING

SAMBO had often rehearsed an imaginary attack by Quantrell, in resisting which he, Sambo, would perform prodigies of valour with his razor-edged axe. The subject indeed was a favourite one with him, both for boastful talk and still more bumptious private imaginings. When the attack really came, however, Sambo was utterly overwhelmed and cut but a sorry figure, like many another boaster occupying a more exalted position than that poor darky at Carthage.

It happened in this wise.

He was drawing in the last loads of fodder out of the field where, according to prairie custom, it had remained in stacks during the winter, and was standing on the top of his load, while Pete and Moses pitched up the long and heavy sheaves to him. This was characteristic of negro work. The strongest man takes the lightest end of the log and uses his superiority to force the weaker ones to save him labour. Sambo was of course much stronger than either Pete or Moses, and pitching up heavy sheaves of Indian cornstalks is far heavier work than merely arranging them on the wagon. Accordingly, Sambo arranged them, and Pete and Moses pitched for dear life. As he was thus standing on the top of his fodder, urging the small boys to greater exertion and taking his own task very easily, he looked around him in a leisurely manner. By and

bye he observed several horsemen on the south side of the farm, and by a strange coincidence a couple more seemed to be making for the bars on the north side. It was a very unusual occurrence to see so many people in that remote neighbourhood.

As Nancy was away, Sambo felt it incumbent on him to do the civil by all visitors. Therefore he hopped nimbly down off his wagon and ran to the bars, leaving Pete and Moses to mop their steaming brows and throw themselves on the ground to rest.

“Say, you darky, ole man to home?” hailed one of the horsemen from the bars.

“No, sar; dar ain’t nobuddy hyar 'cept we culld pussons,” replied Sambo in his grandest manner. He visibly swelled out with pride, and stood affably grinning at the two horseman. One of them laughed aloud at the answer, and made some remark to his companion, at the same time throwing him a coil of fine rope which the latter cast over his saddle horn. The first speaker then turned his horse’s head and galloped off toward the gully, a small valley where the grass grew long and the cattle love to hide. Sambo stood a few paces inside the bars, prepared to do the polite should occasion arise. As soon therefore as the first horseman had ridden away, he said to the one who remained behind:

“Gwine ter ‘light an’ water up yer critter?”

“Yaas, I reckon I’ll ‘light a while. Jess let down them bars.”

Sambo came forward with alacrity, and as he stooped to lower the topmost rail to the ground he heard a slight whir about his ears as something dropped on his shoulders. He put up his hands to feel what it was and received a smart chuck under his chin which nearly sent him off his feet. There was a rope around his neck—a rope with a running noose at one end and the other end in the hand of the man on horseback.

"Don't yer holler or I'll hang yer right plumb hyar to the horn o' my saddle, by thunder!" remarked he, with another suggestive chuck to the rope. Sambo's jaw dropped and he turned green with terror.

"No, mas'r," he faltered, trying to ease his neck with a twist.

"Now then, yo' nigger, let down them bars mighty peart, or yo'll be riz off yer feet."

Sambo took down the bars with speed, finding it difficult to breath with that fearful rope about his neck. A loud noise attracted his attention, and, rolling his eyes around, he beheld a troop of men gallop up out of the gully.

"Got yer colt hitched up?" asked one of the newcomers with a laugh.

"Yaas; an' he's as gentle as a lamb, you bet. Look hyar. Gee! haw!" said Sambo's captor, imitating the words used in driving oxen, and at the same time jerking in the rope. Of course Sambo came up quickly with the jerk. All the men laughed.

"That colt's broke in mighty quick, anyhow," said one of them with gusto.

"Git now, an' scoop up the balance o' the black cusses, so we can make tracks 'fore the word is passed," observed the man with the lasso, who seemed to be in command of the party. They moved forward, Sambo close alongside of his captor in the front rank, and in this humiliating position he came up to the door of the house and was confronted by M'linder standing there open-mouthed.

"Lordy, Sambo, whar yo' gwine tied up like dat ar?" she asked in amazement.

"We're Quantrell's men," was the dread reply. "Any nigger tryin' to break 'way 'ull git a bullet through him; any woman 'ull git a lariat rope roun' her neck like this hyar nigger, an' 'ull have to go afoot 'way

down to the Missouri line. Now yo'll know what yer has to expect from yer new masters."

The negroes shrunk together as the men dismounted and rapidly examined the premises. No one but Aunt Monin said a single word. The rest accepted their destiny in silence. They knew Quantrell's name only too well, and they also knew the character of his men too well to risk angering them in any way. Aunt Monin, however, faced the men dauntlessly.

"What fo' yo' come hyar to dish hyar house? We's all free niggas, we is. Our mistress, what own us all down in Missouri, she done sot us free. De slave owner kin do what he likes wid his slaves," she said valiantly, bringing forward all her powers of argument.

"There ain't no free niggers anywhere in sight o' Quantrell an' his men. Git 'long, granny. Yer boun' for Dixie's land, anyhow," was the answer she received.

"Yo'll riz up all de free-state men from here to Lawrence an' git 'em a'ter yo'," she said, falling back upon threats.

"Quantrell an' his men ain't skeered o' free-state men an' Lawrence. They're goin' to wipe out the whole o' the dog-gauned set o' cussed ab'litionists."

Neither reasoning nor threat was of any avail. Aunt Monin was bundled along and forced to mount up behind one of the riders, just as the other negroes were, not excepting Susannah, who lifted up her voice in song, and, inappropriately enough, began to chant "Glory, halleluiah! we's boun' fo' de promise' lan'." The fodder was pitched out of the wagon, where Pete and Moses had loaded it up with such excessive expenditure of muscle and energy, and into it were packed those two astonished darkies and the rest of the children, together with such valuables as the men upon hasty survey deemed it advisable to steal, and then the wagon was sent off at a quick trot.

A man who had hitherto remained somewhat apart now rode up and inquired in a sharp voice:

“Ready there, are you?”

“You bet it’s ready. Dry as lightwood. Will burn like pitch,” was the answer.

“Then fire up and march,” said the man, who was evidently the leader of the gang. He rode rapidly on toward the front and passed Aunt Monin sitting behind her horseman. She started as she beheld his face.

“De Lo’d is lookin’ down on yo’, Mas’r Jeemes,” she said in a loud voice, “an’ he sees dish hyar de worse day’s work yo’ ebber done in all yer life.”

“Choke that old hag and throw her body down the well to poison the water rats,” said the man savagely. “I’ll not have cackling niggers here, and she’s too old to fetch more than a hundred and fifty dollars anywhere. It ain’t worth while toting her South.”

“Shut up, granny. He’s all-fired mad at jabbering niggers, and he’ll do what he says, by thunder.”

“You bet!” said Aunt Monin’s own cavalier. “Quantrell he’s drowned a heap o’ ole niggers as was kinder in his way. This coon don’t like that sorter work. They screeches awful. Pesky critters to screech is nigger women when y’er chuckin’ ‘em under to drown. They jess lay holt on yer and sticks like pitch plaster.”

Perceiving from these remarks the character of the men who had captured them, Aunt Monin deemed it wise to hold her tongue, and so the troop rode away just as Nancy was congratulating herself upon the departure of what she thought might be a lot of unruly Irish soldiers.

Quantrell’s band rode hard and did not draw rein until late in the night, when they got into the timber land at Rock Creek. Here they were joined by another contingent with a swarm of recaptured slaves. Evidently it was a big raid, and they had collected a lot of

booty. Keeping clear of the settlements, they made for the line in a southeasterly direction toward Black Jack. The luckless Sambo, tied by the neck, was driven in front of the group, and was obliged to run for fear of the horses stepping on him. For fifteen miles on a warm spring day, with the sun beating on his head, that hapless negro had to run, veritably for his life, and his terror and struggles formed a source of never-ending amusement to his brutal captors. At last he went raving mad, foamed at the mouth, cursed and swore, and dashed himself about until the rope tore the skin off his neck and shoulders and he presented a frightful aspect, covered with blood and his wild eyes rolling in his head. Seeing that his market value was likely to be depreciated, Quantrell at length ordered him to be placed in one of the wagons, and the men were deprived of an agreeable sort of sport. Susannah, whose mental deficiency had been soon discovered, was set down on the road a few miles from Carthage.

“Crazy niggers ain’t no more use than dead ones,” said Quantrell. “Turn her loose.”

One of the men suggested firing at her as she ran, and had actually unslung his rifle preparatory to indulging in a little moving-target practice, when Quantrell sternly bade him put up his gun.

“What are you going to waste good powder and ball for on such infernal fooling? Don’t you guess we may have more than enough to do with our powder before we quit Kansas?”

The fellow, who was a young one out on his first ride, looked much abashed at receiving such a public rebuke from so famous a leader, and slunk into the rear to hide his mortification. Although the raiders kept clear of the settlements, they passed some isolated dwellings and were seen by various people as they rode along. So large and imposing a body could hardly escape notice

even on the prairie. The news of their presence soon spread in spite of their fast riding. It was somewhere in the neighbourhood of Black Jack that a doddering old man, riding a sorry-looking mule, joined them. He seemed much delighted at finding himself on the same road as so grand a company, and asked innumerable questions as to where they were going to settle. He "lowed they'd got a sight o' land somewheres roun' as 'ud take such a power o' hands to till." In short, he was so loquacious and so foolishly simple that some of the young men began to get some fun out of him. They worked upon his terrors by all sorts of tales, and finally wound up by declaring they shouldn't wonder if they lighted on Quantrell in the course of the day.

At the mention of the dreaded name the old man begged them to take him along with them and save him from the great guerrilla chief. When they rallied him on his fears he began to boast in the most outrageous manner of how he could fight, and then would sink into a limp state of trepidation at the merest hint thrown out by one of the men that Quantrell was at Bloomington, and might be expected to come that way. In short, the old man was rare sport, and even the stern-faced leader, Quantrell himself, relaxed into more than one smile at the silliness of this crazy old man on the dejected mule.

He rode with them the rest of the day, and even camped with them at night in the woods of Blue Creek. He seemed much delighted with the noise and confusion of picketing out the horses and the general scrimmage that arises when people camp for the night. He wandered around mumbling to himself, nobody paying the slightest heed to him. Thus, when it was quite dark, he stumbled in among the negro men, who were huddled together, tied with ropes, and somewhat insufficiently guarded by a few sentries who had no light by which to see their prisoners. The only fire of the camp was

at a little distance, and was for the comfort of the white men of the party. So the silly old man sat down with the negroes in the dark, while the mules and horses, and the men, and the women and children made considerable noise among them, so that nobody heard him as he softly whispered something in the ears of the bound prisoners—words that sounded to them like the silver trumpet of an angel, nor did the sentries perceive that he was, with a razorlike knife, cutting across the ropes that tied the men together. He had thus liberated some nine full-grown negro men when he slipped quietly off into the bush still unnoticed by anybody at all. In a few minutes the woods rang with a series of the most appalling war whoops that ever chilled a settler's heart, followed by howls and shrieks, as if fifty men were butchering fifty more with every refinement of cruelty. The camp was instantly in an uproar. Shots were fired all round in the seeming direction of the noises. Some of the mules were thus hit, and they squealed and, breaking their lariat ropes, bounded off, bursting through the horses and setting them mad with fright. The shooting, the shouting, the plunging and rearing, lasted several minutes, making a most tremendous noise, as if a battle was in progress. When the mad confusion had subsided it was discovered to the wild amazement of everybody that all the able-bodied negroes had utterly disappeared, no one knew when, no one knew whither.

The old man too was gone, but this fact did not receive any notice in the confusion of the supposed night attack. Indeed he was quite forgotten, as other and more important matters claimed everybody's attention. He was only remembered when, on saddling up in the early morning, something odd was found to be fastened to the halter of Quantrell's horse, which, upon examination, proved to be the long and venerable beard worn by that crazy old man.

"He was a spy, by thunder!" exclaimed Quantrell furiously, when it dawned upon him that he had been made a fool of. "A damned Yankee spy, that's what he was, and I never scented it time enough to shoot him."

After this the raiders hurried forward as fast as they could, for the news of their whereabouts could not remain secret, and Kansas men would be arming for the pursuit. Once over the line, they scattered in all directions, so that the trail might be lost. The young men who had joined for the fun of the thing rode home as rapidly as possible, thanking their stars that they had come back with whole hides out of Kansas; and the old hands, who made a business of raiding, hurried off their band of recaptured slaves toward the Arkansas border with a view to getting them South as fast as possible. Straight south they rode, keeping well inside the Missouri line, along that track of derelict land where the hogs were toiling for their scanty subsistence. They had got as far as Papinsville on their southern march when Aunt Monin was taken most violently ill. Her sufferings, to judge by her lamentations, must have been acute in the extreme. Her shrieks and cries filled the cabin where the negroes were shut up for the night, and in the morning when the time came to move forward, as it did very early in the dim light, she was rigid, with eyes rolled inside out and mouth foaming. A terrible spectacle indeed. One of the men in charge of the captives gave her a smart kick, which failed to create any effect or to arouse her in the least.

"That ole nigger's jess 'bout bust up," he remarked to his pal. "'Tain't no sorter use loiterin' roun' 'count o' her." So he reported the old nigger woman as dead, and the party, with the rest of the captives, moved off. Aunt Monin's recovery dated from the moment that she became aware she was quite alone. She sat up and peered around her. She stood up, and finally shook her

vigorous old fist in the direction in which the slave catchers had disappeared, saying:

“Aha, yo’ ole thief, yo’ ain’t nowheres so cute as ole Aunt Monin. Yo’ ‘low yo’s mighty peart for shu’, on’y yo’ can’t see nuffin ’cept yer ole red nose. Bah! I spit on yo’, I does.”

Whereupon she stalked out of the hut completely recovered from the terrifying fits that had held grip of her all during the night. Clearly Aunt Monin was a very vigorous old woman both in mind and body.

CHAPTER XX

THE TASK OF SISYPHUS

THE education gained in life on a slave plantation is not one calculated to teach helpfulness and self-reliance. There are too many hands whose bounden duty it is to lighten the load on the shoulders of master and mistress for such shoulders to gain very sturdy proportions. Nancy suffered from the defects of her education, and those defects were only in part corrected by the natural force of her character and the energy which was derived from her great pride. She was an exceedingly proud girl, one who writhed under a sense of obligation, unless indeed it was toward some person whom she loved. Then her very pride it was that taught her a sweet humility, as though she could show no greater proof of her love than in subduing that pride and being the gentle recipient of favours from the beloved hand.

Pride is of many complexions, and the ways in which it expresses itself are without number. The pride of the poor Southerner, pinched for money, out at the elbows, was a source of never-failing derision to the keen, successful Yankee, full of commerical prosperity. To the self-made man there is nothing so contemptible as the pride that is founded upon anything but individual exertion and the results thereof. The Southerners had made no very signal exertion until the war of secession, and they had therefore to fall back upon the pride of having ancestors and the accumulated succession of

ideas to be derived from that circumstance. The self-made man, of course, has, so to speak, no ancestors, or only such as serve the purpose of a dark background of failure to show up all the more vividly the bright lights of his own subsequent success in life. The pride, however, of the ruined Southerner, relying for its existence on a misty but distinguished line of forefathers, is of the same quality of mind as that of the aggressive Yankee, counting up his swelling millions and rejoicing in his cuteness in having been able to create them. The mere outsider may be pardoned if he fails to see much to deride in the former or to extol in the latter.

In the first hours of her desolation and terror after her home was burned Nancy was willing to be helped by any kindly soul who would bestow succour. When driving away in Wilson's wagon toward his house she experienced nothing but a sense of comfort and security at being near a man ready and able to protect her. Wilson, moreover, was a kindly hearted, fatherly sort of man who seemed to take an interest in her, and he did not season that interest with the bitter salt of adverse criticism for past failures to do the right thing, after the manner of so many well-meaning people, who thereby implant a sense of exasperation in the hearts of those whom they wish to befriend. Nancy was thankful to him for coming to her in her adversity, and for the moment she could think of nothing but of the relief of getting to his house, where she would be safe and could rest.

This feeling lasted during the ten-mile drive to the Wilsons' home, but it rapidly gave place to another feeling when she saw Mrs. Wilson, a kind-hearted, sour-tongued woman, whose nerves were as unstrung as over-work, poor health, and many children could make them. She had been much concerned at the account her husband had given her of Nancy's misfortune, and she was

quite prepared to show a thankful spirit to Providence for sparing her home from the raiders in the tangible form of kindness to Nancy. But gratitude to Providence, Mrs. Wilson opined, did not include hospitality toward Nancy's black servant, as she chose to consider Susannah, whose unexpected arrival brought into prominence rather the sour tongue than the kind heart.

"Land sakes, Darius, you don't tell me there's a black woman come 'long too!" she observed to her husband in clear thin tones that were perfectly audible to the newly arrived guest. Nancy's pride received a stab through and through. She almost gasped.

"'Pears like as if there must be a sight o' useless folks round in the world if them as is homeless has servants to wait on their poverty," she added, apparently to the long-enduring Darius, but in effect to Nancy.

"I am sorry to be a burden, Mrs. Wilson," began the young girl, the hot colour flooding her pale cheeks as she spoke, "but——"

"You ain't a mite o' burden," broke in her hostess, smitten in her heart and laying strong emphasis upon the personal pronoun. "I was only saying as I don't guess coloured folks is much use, anyhow," which, it may be noted, was not in the least what Mrs. Wilson had really said. Apologies, however, should not be too closely analyzed lest they fall to pieces under the process.

"Wal, wal," said Wilson with much cheeriness, for he was in the habit of sweetening his wife's remarks, knowing how much they needed it, "guess we're all pretty tol'ble hungry, wifie. Can't you scare up some sort o' fixin's to eat an' don't wait for dinner? Dinner, 'cordin' to my 'pinion, is clean out 'o sight when it's two hours off an' you are powerful hungry."

"There's food kep' hot o' purpose in the oven, father, an' there's plenty too for the coloured woman," re-

plied his wife, making the *amende honorable* according to her best ability.

The food, though good, very nearly choked Nancy, hungry as she was. And this shows the strength of her pride, for hunger as a rule brings people smartly to a dead level of mere animal sensation, wherein all the finer fibres of the mind are completely dulled, so that they give over feeling, or perhaps it would be more correct to say that for the time being they do not vibrate to the finer feelings. Wilson, with the hearty good nature of a strong man and feeling pity for Nancy's desolation, had brought her to his house without definite invitation and without limiting her stay in any way. It never occurred to him to do so. It very quickly occurred to his wife, however, to inquire how long she was likely to be their guest.

"Why, Lordy, Lordy, jess as long as she likes," replied the heedless husband.

"And the coloured woman? I want to know, Darius, if we've got to keep the two of them all summer?" asked his wife, her keen green-gray eyes looking him through and through, and her thin pale lips shutting tightly over her mouth once they had let the words out.

"I guess she'll do kinder handy as a hired girl, an' help you see to things an' mind the children, Cinthy," replied her foolish lord.

"Darius Wilson, I'm surprised at you!" observed his wife severely, at which Darius looked uneasily first at one boot heel and then at the other. "Do you guess I'm going to begin having those lazy no-account negro women around in my house hindering me in my work—me as had fifteen cows all to my own hand in York State and washed and scalded the milk pans every blessed day without a mite o' help from anybody! No, Darius, I ain't going to have the folks down to Oneonta say as

Cinthy Wilson can do her housework no more, and is drove to take a sloppy coloured woman to mess round in her house."

This was the form Mrs. Wilson's pride took, and Darius in the course of his married life had frequently to suffer at the hands of those scalded milk pans and those fifteen cows, if one may be permitted the use of so violent a metaphor.

This, then, was the somewhat unfriendly haven into which Fate had guided Nancy Overton. As we have said, her education and her experience were both defective, but her pride now came to the rescue and supplied motive power enough to overcome all difficulties. Instead of remaining a passive eater of food under the Wilsons' roof, not a week elapsed before she had made her plans and taken her decision. The raiders under Quantrell had, it is true, burned everything she possessed—that is, all that was combustible. They could not burn the land, however. Accordingly, that remained to Nancy, and once more the luckless girl found herself with a farm to sell. But the blackened and devastated ruins of Carthage constituted a very different sort of asset from that snug farm down in Missouri, as she soon found out. However, there was a man in Tecumseh who agreed to give her a few hundred dollars for her land. She eagerly closed with the bargain, absurdly disadvantageous as it was, and with feverish haste returned to the Wilsons with the money, part of which had been paid to her to clinch the bargain.

Once more there was a burning spot on her cheeks as she again broached the subject of her board and lodging while with the worthy farmer and his wife. This time her eyes sparkled with something that was not tenderness of feeling as she handed a small roll of greenbacks to Mrs. Wilson.

"We have, I am sure, been a great burden to you,

Mrs. Wilson, my poor afflicted Susannah and myself, but if you will accept this small sum in payment for our board and lodging I shall be glad."

Mrs. Wilson made some slight show of resistance and then accepted the money, but she kept the fact a secret from her good-tempered husband, as there were certain things about which he was exceedingly obstinate and determined. The unerring instinct derived from twenty years of wedded life made her know that this question of taking money from Nancy for her board would be just one of those very things. Paying the money gratified Nancy's pride, accepting it enabled Mrs. Wilson to buy several much-needed articles of apparel for the children, and Darius was not troubled with any details likely to disturb the even tenor of his good humour. Mrs. Wilson compromised with her conscience by giving Susannah quite a number of sound and useful articles of clothing, so that altogether that forlorn person was quite respectably made up for her new life in Lawrence. She and her scarcely less forlorn young mistress left the Wilsons and started out upon the world together. Seldom had a more helpless pair faced the unknown under more depressing circumstances.

The sense of her complete failure came upon Nancy with ever increasing force. Had it not been for Susannah's helplessness and the knowledge that she must exert herself for the sake of the mulatto woman, perhaps she would never have borne up against it all. With the crazy woman entirely dependent upon her, the young girl felt some of the responsibilities a mother might feel who had a child to take care of. She must struggle on and make another effort for the sake of Susannah, the last of her family of negroes.

Instinct rather than an aptitude for business told her what to do. There is always one sort of work which is wanted in every community, one sort of work that

pays, one sort of work that women are fitted for. Nancy had failed as an enthusiastic enfranchiser of slaves; she could no longer hope to succeed as a Kansas settler, but there was one thing she could do. She could cook for hungry men. Behold her, then, in very different circumstances from what we have hitherto seen her. She is shorn of the glory of being a queen on a small scale over her little kingdom of slaves or freed negroes. She is no longer the centre of her little world, as she has been hitherto, the one to whom all looked up. It is recorded of a king of France that once when a foreign sovereign was coming to pay him a visit at Versailles his Majesty showed the greatest alarm and concern at the expected event. It turned out that the cause of this seemingly groundless perturbation was the fact that his Majesty felt he did not know how to behave to an equal, having never before been anything but in veriest truth the monarch of all he surveyed. Owing to her strangely isolated life and the condition under which she had lived at Carthage, Nancy had in a small measure been like the king of France. Her will, gentle though it was, had been law, and her rule was uncontested. A long continuance of this life of isolation combined with native pride would in the end have made her a hard, imperious woman. To develop such a character there is not needed a kingdom as large as France. A small country place will suffice, if the initial native pride be there and unquestioning obedience be its portion.

The swift destruction that overwhelmed Carthage and the consequent destitution of its young mistress may have been necessary to the development of her character as well as to its training, but it was one of those bitter lessons the utility of which is much more clearly apparent to the onlooker than to the person smarting under the severity of the training. Nancy did

not look upon it as a chastening that she deserved. She did not consider her pride needed any chastening. On the contrary, she called upon it to carry her through the trials which even she foresaw were in store for her. Life looked very dreary as she entered upon this new phase of her existence. Charlie Heaton was gone, perhaps never to return, and now Aunt Monin too was lost. She literally had nothing on the face of God's earth to love but a crazy mulatto woman. This crazy woman, an added burden some would have thought, was the one thing that saved her. The necessity of taking care of Susannah made work imperative, and the mind can not sink into hopeless despair when the body is hard worked.

It was hard work and no mistake.

Nancy rented a small wooden house, a mere shanty of two rooms with a loft. Over the door of this shanty she painted in bold letters with her own hand, "Eating House." There were a good many people, teamsters and the like, passing through Lawrence on their way out West, and it was Nancy's hope to attract to her modest restaurant those who were too poor to go to the Free State Hotel. Hungry men soon scent good food. Nancy's eating house, although standing away from the main street, did not long remain undiscovered. She began to get a little custom immediately, and before the summer was well set in had as much work as she and Susannah could possibly manage.

The ancient Greeks created Sisyphus and his stone forever rolling from the top of the hill as an embodiment of the idea of never-ending labour. The modern antitype is a woman doing housework. No sooner had Sisyphus got his stone to the hilltop than, we are told, it tumbled inconveniently to the bottom, and he had to begin his labour all over again. So with housework.

No sooner is the last pot washed and the last plate put on the dresser after breakfast than down comes the first saucepan preparatory to dinner. All the work has to be done over again, and the sinful confusion of an after-dinner kitchen is hardly resolved into order when the riot of the on-coming supper begins to make itself felt. We have no authoritative statement as to how his stone rolling affected the temper of Sisyphus, but if we are to judge by the effect of prolonged housework on cooks, he must have been as cross as ten cats.

This, then, is the work that Nancy plunged into along with Susannah when she set up her eating house in the back street of Lawrence. She was young, strong, and healthy, and Susannah worked with the passive endurance of a machine, yet the two women were tired to death every night when at length they laid their weary bodies to rest in the hot and dark little loft which Nancy dignified by the name of "her room." The summer came scorching on, as it does in Kansas, first with a hot whiff and then with a blast as from a smelting furnace. It scorched up the grass and made the trees by the Kaw River look as if a prairie fire had passed that way. Even the water in the river looked hot and listless, and, as though it had no more energy to run its long course to the sea, it only crawled slimly along, trembling under the fierce glare of a pitiless sun that made the sky copper hued with the heat.

Yet the baking of pumpkin pies by the acre and the boiling of bacon and beans by the cart load, with the daily mixing up of hot soda biscuits, went on uninterrupted in the little eating house. Small wonder that Nancy looked pale and thin, and that the curl went out of her crisp black hair, leaving limp little rings lying flatly on her white forehead. Her vigorous young hands were marked with many a red sign of scald and

burn, and her white round arms, bare high over the elbow, were dappled with flour, as she bravely worked on, baking, boiling, stewing, and roasting, washing and cleaning all day long, to stagger wearily to rest when the night at length came.

CHAPTER XXI

AUNT MONIN'S QUEST

WHEN Aunt Monin arose after her miraculous recovery from "fits," and had expressed her wrath and contempt for her stupid captors in the emphatic way already set forth, she found herself entirely thrown upon her own wits for support. She determined, in the first instance, to lie perdu until darkness set in, for she knew that she was in the enemy's country, and that it would be difficult for her to give a plausible account of herself, supposing she came across any one who chose to make inquiries. Accordingly, she crept off to an old empty corncrib that stood in a neighbouring field, and curled herself up among the cornshucks to pass the day. What she hoped for was to come across some friendly darkey, who, knowing the locality, would help her to get safely away. She passed the hours in softly talking and singing to herself, except when she slept, which she did lightly at intervals. It was during one of these fox's sleeps that a boy appeared chanting melodiously, "Come, oh, my hogs, ain't yer gwine ter be fed," in a beautiful minor cadence quite foreign to the commonplace meaning of the words. Aunt Monin awoke instantly, or rather opened her other eye, for one may be said to have remained open all the time, and sat up. A youth of about fourteen pulled open the rickety door and began to grab at the shucks nearest to him, while grunts and squawks in all keys denoted that his

cantata had not been sung to an unappreciative audience.

“What for yo’ come so late, chile? I’se bin waitin’ an’ waitin’ everlastin’ long,” observed Aunt Monin somewhat sternly.

“Lordy! Golly Ned!” exclaimed the boy, considerably startled. “Who dat dar?”

He dropped his shucks and backed hurriedly out of the door.

“Come back hyar, yo’ poor silly possum. Don’t yo’ know ole Aunt Monin? I’se s’prised at yo’, I is,” remarked the old woman with scorn. The boy was abashed, as she meant he should be, and came again into the doorway apologetically.

“Dish hyar crib is mighty kinder dark,” he said; “I nebber seed yo’.”

“In course yo’ didn’t; dat why I done holler out ter yo’,” said Aunt Monin, “so yo’ needn’t be skeered o’ nothin’.”

“I warn’t nary mite skeered,” replied the boy, detecting in this remark a distinct slur upon his manhood.

“Knowed yo’ warn’t,” answered Aunt Monin cordially. “No sorter chile I hearn tell on was skeered o’ ole Aunt Monin.”

She laughed cheerfully.

“Yo’ bet,” said the boy, grinning likewise.

International diplomacy itself could not go further for mutual pretences and complete falsification of the truth, veiled in conventional courtesies.

“Jess run ’long an’ tell ’em ole Aunt Monin’s bin powerful sick an’ weak an’ sorter stan’s in the need o’ ‘sistance,” said she, eying him keenly.

“Got ter feed dem hogs fust,” said the boy, “else ole mas’r crack my skull for me.”

“To be shu’. Yo’ don’t go for to not feed dem

hogs, on'y den yo' tell yer mammy what I done say," repeated Aunt Monin.

"Mammy done gone 'way."

"Whar?" asked Aunt Monin with keenest anxiety of voice and manner. "Now, chile, yo' don't go for ter tell me she done gone clar off, an' dat I ain't gwine ter see her no mo'."

"Mammy she stay with ole man Lewis down to the ordinary. She done hire out dar and cook fo' ole man Lewis. Mas'r Tom he don't keep all his niggas to home no mo' now."

Aunt Monin took in all these details in a twinkling.

"Den I'se gwine ter see her 'gain," she said with a sigh of satisfied affection; "when yo' gwine down ter de ordinary, chile?"

"Mas'r Tom he don't say nuffin. I go 'long dar jess when I want ter. We uns mos' like free niggas now. Mammy she done give me jumble cakes and m'larses candy fo' Marfa Jane."

The lad fed his hogs, while Aunt Monin stood leaning against the doorway, talking unconcernedly to him, and thus learning incidentally all she wanted in regard to where she was. He, having accepted her as an old acquaintance of his mother's whom he ought to have remembered but did not, was perfectly friendly and chatty.

"Reckon I'll go 'long wid yo', honey," said Aunt Monin when the evening job was over and he came to shut up the crib. "I'se kinder lonesome hyar, an' sorter longin' ter see Marfa Jane."

So the pair set off together, and Aunt Monin congratulated herself on having begun so very well in finding just the sort of person who was likely to be useful to her. The cornercrib where she had been hiding was situated in a clump of trees, and when Aunt Monin emerged from this place of concealment she at once no-

ticed the deserted look of everything. Some blackened heaps, now half grown over with weeds and grass, told their tale plainly enough, and if the story needed any annotation this was supplied by the appearance of the few existing houses, which, though small and wretched, were one and all perfectly new. The place had been burned, and that within a couple of years.

“Who done burn dish hyar city?” she asked, swinging her long arm comprehensively around the desolate scene.

“Jay-Hawkers outer Kansas. Ole Mas’r Tom dey burn up his house an’ all de corn too, an’ he don’t do nuffin now on’y drink heap o’ whisky an’ lamm his niggas,” replied the boy with a grin of amusement.

They thus proceeded to a wretched hovel where rolling blissfully in the dust was Marfa Jane, a fat spoiled child of nine, who howled at the sight of the newcomer. The mother had not yet returned from her culinary duties at Lewis’s ordinary.

“Marfa Jane, yo’ hain’t got no manners, yo’ hain’t,” said Aunt Monin severely. “I ain’t agwine ter tell yer mammy if yo’ come right hyar an’ behave like a good little gal.”

Marfa Jane subsided, but edged away, keeping a sharp lookout upon the stranger. The way in which Aunt Monin took command of that hut, and how she ordered the children to produce their provisions, and the speed with which she tossed together a pone and baked it in the hot ashes, giving it to them to eat just at the right moment, was a sight. The two children were delighted with their new friend and cuddled up to her when she began to sing song after song in her sweet old quavering voice.

Of course Aunt Monin’s diplomacy was all directed toward the attainment of a single purpose, namely, her escape back into Kansas. Her mind was set on return-

ing to Carthage and to Nancy. No matter how far she might have been carried by her captors she would never have abandoned that object as long as life lasted. She had begun to look out for her opportunity almost from the outset, but it was not till she reached Papinsville that chance favoured her by a change in the men who had charge of the party. When the cook at Lewis's ordinary returned, it is needless to say that to her Aunt Monin at once explained who she was and what was the help she wanted.

“Sis’er,” said the cook eagerly, “I’se gwine ter ’list the help o’ de bredren. Dar’s Brer Henry Jeemes down de turnpike, an’ he’s jess gran’ to riz up an’ pray on dish hyar un’ertakin’. Dar’s signs an’ won’ers in de lan’, sis’er, an’ de sperit o’ de Lo’d move de multitude to strive fo’ righteousness,” said sister Lu, who was greatly given to Aunt Monin’s own practice of holding mystically forth. “De han’ o’ de Lo’d is riz up. Glory, halleluiah! Dem ole bushwhackers under ole man Holtz-claw is somewhar roun’ in de brush south o’ Jefferson,” she added, a bit of worldly gossip bursting into her mysticism and streaking it like a shaft of light thrown across a foggy atmosphere.

“Is dem ole secesh bushwhackers anywhars roun’ hyar?” inquired Aunt Monin, with an eye to personal consequences.

“I hearn tell de secesh armies is comin’ right ’long dish time. Dey is gwine ter whop dem Yankees, anyhow,” replied sister Lu, who from being cook in a tavern frequented by Southerners was imbued with their faulty notions concerning the progress of the war and the probable course thereof.

“Sis’er, I’se gwine ter start fer my honey-chile dish bressed night,” announced Aunt Monin, who saw all sorts of dangers to herself in the near proximity of victorious Confederate armies.

"Sis'er, yo' ain't gwine ter set out on dish journey 'thout takin' council o' de bredren an' axin' de blessin' o' de Lo'd in full meetin'?" remonstrated sister Lu, with a relapse into the religious character again.

"Reckon de blessin' o' de Lo'd ain't partic'lar sot on comin' down through yer meetin'house. He can sen' it right 'long anywheres," replied Aunt Monin, with the natural scorn of a rival exponent of religion in face of one who arrogated superior airs unto herself.

"Which way yo' gwine ter start?" asked sister Lu, coming to practical details.

"I's gwine northwest. We come southeast; I know dat ar," answered Aunt Monin, who had all a negro's unerring instinct for direction.

"De brush in de Osage is plumb full o' bushwhackers. I seed a man las' week tole me," said sister Lu anxiously.

Aunt Monin rose up and stood a long, lank form towering high above sister Lu's fat, stumpy body. Her great black eyes shone with an unearthly sort of lustre.

"I'se gwine," she announced briefly.

"Sis'er, ax de blessin' on dish hyar un'ertakin'," remonstrated her companion.

"Reckon I'll sorter ax de blessin' while I'm makin' tracks fo' Kansas. De Lo'd he'll un'erstan' how dish ole nigga's in powerful hurry, an' he'll listen while I'm goin' 'long de road ter my honey-chile. Dat chile ain't nebber slep' nary night 'way from ole Aunt Monin since she war ten days ole. She'll be a-callin' out for me. Hark! I mos' allers hears her voice in de trees, an' comin' down from de sky a-sayin', 'Aunt Monin, Aunt Monin, come back ter yer honey-chile.'"

"Ain't yo' got on'y one chile?" asked sister Lu, to whom this seemed an unexampled state of affairs with a healthy negro woman.

"On'y dat one what de Lo'd sen' ter me in de hours

o' sin an' 'fliction fer ter save my soul from 'struction,'" answered Aunt Monin, who could be as vague as sister Lu when once she started in that line.

Nothing could turn her from her purpose of starting off that very same night on her return journey into Kansas; so, with a good store of hard corn bread, than which there is nothing more sustaining or more portable, Aunt Monin stepped out into the darkness with no guide but the north star and her faith in God. She never had a moment's doubt that she could get back into Kansas, if only she was not stopped by the bush-whackers. Her constant dread was that she might run into a stray troop of them. Accordingly, she resolved to do all her walking by night and to lie hidden during the hours of daylight. Aunt Monin was at an age when exertion, if supported by a fervent inward impulse, seemed to have no effect upon her. Her long lean arms hung limply by her side, and her long lean legs swung over the ground with a shaking sort of gait that reminded one, ridiculously enough, of a camel. She did not carry an ounce of useless flesh. Her body was made of bones and whicord, and her mind was set to a single purpose. Just the type of a fanatic, perhaps, but the type that accomplishes what it sets out to do in all ages and in all climes.

Leaving Papinsville just as the moon rose, Aunt Monin found herself following a northwesterly course by a road which seemed latterly to have fallen into disuse. Trees lay across it in the bottom land, while in the open the grass had overgrown the deep ruts of former wagon tracks. All through the silent night she tramped steadily onward. Morning found her on the highlands overlooking the valley of the Osage. She stopped to rest and to eat some of her corn bread; meanwhile she gazed keenly about her. There was no poetry or sentiment in her that vibrated to the strange wild-

ness of the scene around her. All the poetry of Aunt Monin's nature had long since run to love of her "honey-chile," leaving nothing to feed other emotions. But she looked none the less keenly at the scene before her. Suddenly she jumped up and struck her lean hands smartly together.

"Glory, halleluiah!" she sang with a ring of exultation. "I knowed de Lo'd was guidin' me slap outer de lan' o' bondage 'way down inter de lan' o' freedom. Dar flows de Ribber Jordan. I'se gwine ter cross over into de lan' o' Canaan. Glory, halleluiah!"

She had recognised the scene, and this outburst was caused by the fact that Mine Creek, the border stream, lay within reach of her active limbs; another night's walk would bring her to its fateful banks. No wonder that she intoned her song of triumph. Not very far away up the river valley was the farm where she had lived, the farm where "ole mas'r" had been killed by the Jay-Hawkers, and where the drama of Nancy's life had begun. The old negress rested during the day curled up on the sunny side of a cottonwood bush, like a copperhead basking in the fresh warmth of the spring sunshine. Such a proceeding as this would have been destructive to any but a negro as hard and as tough as Aunt Monin. She, however, felt no more harm from it than if she had actually been the snake to which she has been likened. As soon as night came on again up she started, her soul exulting in the thought of her nearness to the border. Considerable time was lost in going around the head waters of two or three unfordable creeks that flowed into the Osage; thus it was not until the afternoon of the third day from Papinsville that she found herself on the banks of Mine Creek. She had not met a living creature during the whole march. This would not have been possible in the days before

the war, but that part of Missouri was, as we have already said, quite deserted.

At the creek she found a man trying to get a load of coal across, a doubtful proceeding, as his horses seemed hardly up to the work. He had evidently come from the coal mine, and was going into Kansas with a heavy load. Aunt Monin concluded he must be going home, and that his home was in Kansas; therefore he must be a free-state man, and she might trust him. Coming out of the brushwood where she had been lying concealed, she said:

“I’ll help yo’ unload half dat dar, if yo’ll give me a hoist over de Ribber Jordan, mas’r.”

“I don’t take toll from coloured people. Hop in, my good soul,” replied the man with unmistakable abolitionist manner and diction. “I never heard this creek called the River Jordan before. Mine Creek is the name it mostly goes by round here.”

“It am de Ribber Jordan, mas’r, ’cause I’se gwine ter cross it inter de promise’ lan’,” replied Aunt Monin impressively, as she clambered up beside him on the driving board.

He gave a satisfied grunt of amusement, and they plunged into the water. Mine Creek was only moderately high now and presented no particular difficulties in the crossing at this time; but just on the other side of the water there was a most portentous mudhole, into which the heavy laden coal wagon plunged and there stuck fast. The driver urged his horses; they tried once or twice, and then gave it up, as horses always do when they imagine they are stalled.

“Well, I swan!” said the man with resignation.

“Pray to de Lo’d, mas’r, an’ unload de wagon,” said Aunt Monin.

“Sound advice,” said her companion with a chuckle, “sound practical advice. Reminds me of Cromwell’s

direction to 'trust in the Lord and keep your powder dry.' Did you ever hear of that, granny?"

"No, mas'r, nebber hearn tell o' Cromwell. Was he riz out in Missouri?"

"No; but his spirit seems to have come there to dwell. Guess I'll unhitch and come down to-morrow with four horses. You can come along home with me. I don't live far, and I guess you'll be glad of a good night's rest, eh?"

"Yes, mas'r, I would. I've come afoot from Papinsville, an' I'se gwine ter Carthage," replied Aunt Monin simply.

"Well, I'll help you along the road a bit," said her new friend kindly, as he brought his now released horses out of the mudhole, leaving the wagon behind. He was as good as his word and lost no time in making inquiries for some one going north with a wagon. In this way Aunt Monin got various "lifts" from different teamsters, so that she did not have to depend very much on her own powers of walking, and she reached Tecumseh far sooner than she would have done if left to her own devices; in fact, she was there some ten days or so after crossing Mine Creek.

It was with a heart overflowing with joy that she set out at length on the familiar road from Tecumseh to Carthage. It was a little over three weeks since the raiders had carried her off from Nancy, and as she tramped along she began to act over and over again the great scene of her meeting with her "honey-chile" which was so soon to be a reality. It was a fresh May morning, and the dew twinkled merrily on the grass which was still in the tender green of early spring, before the wear and tear of summer had tarnished its beauty. The air was still and clear, and the sky bright shining blue. There was a hush over the prairie, a solemn loneliness that would have struck a more imagina-

tive traveller. There are no birds on those wide-reaching plains; the air is dead to their song and their chatter. Sometimes a solitary crow flies slowly along uttering occasional croaks of discontent, but of song birds there are none. High in the air, faintly specking the blue vault of heaven, were to be seen little V-shaped patterns, like triangles with no base, moving apex foremost straight north, and from time to time these baseless triangles sent forth long shrill screams. They were the wild geese flying north, a sure sign that summer was coming. Unerringly they winged their way toward the distant north in one long flight from the shores of the Mexican Gulf to the lone lands of the arctic seas. Always flying in carefully constructed triangles with the chief in front, steadily breasting their way north across that immense continent, they used to pass over the prairies in countless thousands every spring and autumn.

As steadily as the wild geese, if not so fast, Aunt Monin pursued her way toward Carthage. Her excitement increased as she came into the last bottom land, and she knew she would get a sight of Carthage when once she stood on the top of the next ridge. Her faithful heart swelled with love and a feeling of immense pride mingled therewith. She would tell her child that no one, not even the dreaded slave catchers themselves, were as strong as her love. No one was cute enough to keep old Aunt Monin from breaking away and getting back to her honey-chile. She began with the dramatic instincts of her race to declaim about it aloud, setting her words to a sort of harmonious droning song. The rude mind invariably turns to declamation and melody to express emotion, and the negro falls instinctively into lyric poetry of a boastful character in moments of great excitement:

“ De ole slave catchers done gone der way,
Can’t fer ter keep de ole woman safe;
De ole slave catchers dey better blin’ der eyes,
Don’t fer ter know when de ole nigga dies.”

Thus chanted Aunt Monin victoriously as she mounted the last slope up to the high prairie. Her feelings became so excited she could not stay to finish her song of triumph, but ended in the dear old familiar Glory, halleluiah! in one great howl of joy as she got to the top.

Carthage, with its little cluster of huts around the frame house, should have showed up clear against the western horizon, about three miles ahead. She had often seen it thus outlined against the red setting sun on returning from Tecumseh. There was nothing on the horizon line to-day. “ Glory, halleluiah!” died on Aunt Monin’s lips, and a wail of despair came in its place.

“ Whar de home o’ de honey-chile?” she cried, gazing with wide open eyes at the strange scene. One little hut alone stood where there used to be at least a half dozen buildings. As she neared the familiar spot she perceived the heaps of blackened ruins, which only too clearly told their tale. Some cattle were standing in what had been Nancy’s little flower garden. When the poor old negress saw this her heart overflowed in a torrent of passionate grief. It was like being suddenly confronted with the stiffened corpse of a baby of whose death she had not heard. It was the reality of the desolation brought home to her own sight and feeling. She wept and prayed by turns, as she wandered broken-hearted among the ruins of Nancy’s home.

“ De han’ o’ de ’stroyer is laid on my honey-chile,” she cried aloud, “ an’ des’lation an’ ’struction has fallen ’pon her. Aunt Monin warn’t dar fer ter ’stain her an’ comfort her in her ’fliction. Oh, my honey-

'chile! Whar yo' gone 'way from de sight o' yer po' ole Aunt Monin?"

Weeping, praying, and singing by turns, the old woman spent hours wandering aimlessly about those blackened heaps. Sometimes she would tell herself which were the different houses upon whose ruins she was standing, but after every outburst she resumed her despairing cry for her lost "honey-chile."

As the negroes had been all hurried away by Quantrell's raiders before the houses were set on fire, they had not known that the place was burned, for prisoners don't hear much news from the captors. Aunt Monin therefore was ignorant of the destruction of Nancy's home, and the shock of her disappointment was correspondingly cruel after having lived all those days in hope and confidence. Had she reasoned on the subject she might have suspected it, but negroes never reason; they only feel, and that too when facts are forced upon them. Aunt Monin had never for one moment imagined that she would not find Nancy in her old home, and the joy of once more seeing that child of her heart had been the only emotion that had occupied her mind during the whole time of her absence. She never thought or wondered about anything else. Nancy was at Carthage alone, and she, Aunt Monin, was going to return to her. The disappointment was so great, so cruel, that for some hours the poor old soul seemed absolutely stunned by it. Her wits, sharpened to the attainment of the one object of her life, seemed now to have deserted her. She couldn't think of anything. She didn't try. She was benumbed and gave up, making no mental effort whatsoever to face this new disaster. How long she would have stayed at Carthage singing over the dirge of her despair, it is impossible to say. She was at length aroused by the arrival of a darky who came to look after the cows that were in-

quisitively poking around the ruins and trampling over Nancy's little flower garden. He was immensely surprised to see Aunt Monin, whom he knew.

"Who done dat dar?" inquired Aunt Monin, pointing to the blackened ruins.

"Ole man Quantrell. We uns 'lowed he done run yo' niggas off," replied the darky.

"De day o' judgment'll come ter him. He'll have ter answer to de angel o' de Lo'd fo' de evil dat he done. He'll have ter pay back to de Lo'd in suff'rin' fo' de 'struction an' des'lation o' dish hyar home, an' de Lo'd he'll sen' his soul to hell for retribution," said Aunt Monin, indulging in the luxury of a deferred vengeance.

The darky was impressed with the notion of this being a sort of prayer meeting; accordingly he said "Glory, halleluiah! Amen," and rolled up his eyes until the whites only remained visible.

"Whar Miss Nancy gone?" she next inquired.

"Gone off East," he said, repeating what he had casually heard. "She an' de mad nigga, Susanner, done gone off together."

Aunt Monin began to wail afresh. The friendly darky at length persuaded her to come home with him, so that "his ole woman could fix her up and feed her." Having now no aim or object in life and no plans of any sort, she went willingly enough with him. She stayed some little time with these kindly souls, making no effort to find Nancy beyond asking those she happened to meet "whar she done gone?" Her return from Papinsville across the border back to Carthage had been executed with such energy and such skill it may seem surprising that the same person should now be incapable of further effort. The journey from over the border presented difficulties, no doubt, but they were all difficulties she could grapple with, because she understood them. The foxlike necessity for walking at night

so as to keep out of sight of the bushwhackers was a stratagem within her comprehension; the physical exertion was not much at her age, buoyed up as she was by the hope of soon seeing Nancy again. Now that that hope was gone, she seemed to sink at once into helplessness and to have lost the power of devising any plans. How to set about finding her honey-chile in that vast vague region known as "the East" was a problem quite beyond her powers to solve. She could, of course, neither read nor write, and if she could I don't know that the accomplishment would have helped her much. The only thing that occurred to her was to "ax folks," and unfortunately she did not chance across the Wilsons, the only people who could have told her anything of her lost one. Having come to this decision in consultation with her negro hosts, she again, according to their advice, chose Kansas City as the place where asking would be of the most use. In this she was well advised apparently, since Kansas City was the gate of northern Kansas—the gate, moreover, through which most people passed on their way to and from the interior.

She soon became known on the levee at Kansas City. She used to go down to the steamboat landing to meet all the boats coming up or down the river, but it was mostly the up-river steamers she haunted with particular perseverance; for having come to think Nancy was gone East she was forever hoping to get news of her from that direction. The steamboat men took a friendly interest in her and used to buoy her up with false hopes; it seemed to them so pathetic to see that old negress always at the landing, day after day, wistfully scanning the hurrying passengers for a face she was never destined to see among them. The negro hands on the boats in especial were interested in her quest, and made inquiries down the river as far even as St. Louis, all to no purpose of course, since each revolution of the

paddle wheel eastward took them away from where Nancy was baking her pumpkin pies and boiling her bacon and beans.

Aunt Monin's search was not wholly in vain. A friend turned up one morning on board the boat from St. Louis, a grinning, delighted friend, none other than the redoubtable Sambo, who appeared in all the glory of first-class waiterhood on board the steamer. Her heart leaped with joy to see his happy conceited face once more, but she wasn't going to let on before him, not she. Eying him therefore with a glance of stern inquiry she asked:

“Yo', Sambo, whar yo' bin all dish time? What fo' yo' nebber come back befo'? I'se bin waitin' a long while.”

“I'se pusson what had speriences,” replied Sambo in his best manner, which had become several degrees finer since he was a steamer hand in regular employment. “I'se done seed a heap, Aunt Monin, since we uns was run off by Quantrell. I'se bin in a big fight.”

He had, in fact, escaped from his captors near the Mississippi, for they had suddenly to scatter, owing to the unexpected approach of some Federal troops. One of those numberless small conflicts between General Price's forces and the Federals took place, and Sambo, hearing the sound of heavy guns, crept into a hollow log and lay there for a day and a night in mortal terror. He was far beyond the range of the largest gun except in his imagination, but he endured all the frights of a real battle in the most vivid completeness.

“Why don't yo' make 'quiries 'bout Miss Nancy?” asked Aunt Monin jealously.

“I'se gwine ter. I'se gwine ter pay my 'spect to Miss Nancy dish hyar bressed day,” replied Sambo with alacrity.

“Boy, I'se done lost her,” said Aunt Monin, catch-

ing his arm anxiously and gazing at him with wistful eyes. "Dar ain't bin nary minute since we was run off dat I don't think 'bout my chile, but de Lo'd's deaf to my prayer. I'se done lost her, and I can't find her."

Aunt Monin's voice trailed off into a wail of sorrow.

"I'se gwine ter look for her. Don't yo' make no mo' lamentation. I'll fin' her, Aunt Monin," said Sambo, never the one to think lightly of his own powers.

"Whar yo' look?"

"I'se gwine ter make 'quiries roun' 'mong de white gemblemen. I'se got consid'ble 'quaintance 'mong white gemblemen now," said Sambo, swelling with importance. Aunt Monin was too eager in her quest to think of damping his courage, otherwise she would have put a pin into the outrageously distended balloon of his self-conceit.

One day in high midsummer Sambo arrived at the landing stage in a state of turbulent excitement.

"Ho, Aunt Monin!" he shouted triumphantly; "look hyar! I'se foun' him fer yo'."

"Has yo' got word o' my honey-chile?" demanded the old woman, whose mind seemed now capable of holding only one idea.

"Mos' as good as dat," said Sambo. "Mas'r Capt'ning Charlie Heaton he on de steamboat. He come fer ter git Miss Nancy."

A long, gaunt, cadaverous creature, with shoulders sticking out like plough handles, and flabby clothes flopping around legs like telegraph posts, came along the gangway. He had a yellow-greenish face and a long beard. Of Charlie Heaton's handsome face there remained nothing recognisable except his eyes. To such a pass had a wound and swamp fever reduced the once dashing soldier. He had considered himself an invalid, but the thought that Nancy was gone and must be found by him seemed to endow his lean body with an almost

superhuman energy. He had come back on sick leave to see Nancy, and to be petted and nursed by her back into the life which he had all but lost in the cause to which he had devoted himself. After long, weary months of illness and suffering it seemed to him that perhaps his atonement was complete and that she would forgive him. And now, just as he was at the end of his journey, he seemed to have come also to the end of his hopes.

The disappointment had the exactly opposite effect upon him from what it had had on Aunt Monin. It roused him to instant energy and action. Sambo had told him all there was to be told, and before he reached Kansas City his plans were made.

“Dish is de han’ o’ de Lo’d!” exclaimed Aunt Monin, as she saw him and recognised the advent of a superior intelligence to be added now to her own devotion in prosecuting the quest.

“I guess we’ll find her out somehow,” said he, with kindly encouragement, in reply to the old nurse’s rhapsodies.

He proceeded in a most methodical manner, one which brought result so speedily that Aunt Monin saw in it a special providence, and became more and more mystical day by day. Captain Heaton simply went to the Government office at Lecompton and found out who paid the taxes on Nancy’s quarter section of land. He took both Sambo and Aunt Monin with him, for he knew that the surest way to Nancy’s heart was through those slaves for whose sake she had sacrificed so much. Sambo was intelligently useful, Aunt Monin was ecstatically hopeful and in a perennial state of composing songs of triumph relative to her meeting again with her “honey-chile.” Having discovered the owner of the land, it was easy to learn Nancy’s whereabouts from him.

These various inquiries had consumed some little

time, so that it was not until the evening of the 21st of August that Heaton at length found himself driving toward the town of Lawrence. The 21st of August, 1863, was a black day in the annals of Lawrence, and as Heaton looked down upon the town his heart stood still with horror.

Instead of the bright little town nestling among the trees on the Kaw River, a great smoking gap of blackened ruins lay between Winthrop Street and Warren Street, while on either side of Massachusetts Street two long lines of shapeless cinders marked where the business houses had stood. Columns of smoke rose on the motionless air from a dozen widely separated points of the town. But it was not the smoke nor the blackened heaps bordering Massachusetts Street that made Heaton's eyes dilate with horror. It was the quick, sharp sounds of stray pistol shots here and there and the long-drawn wailings of women who were crouching over objects that lay upon the ground in the streets.

CHAPTER XXII

THE BURNING OF LAWRENCE

WE left Nancy running her eating house at Lawrence with the help of Susannah. We find her there on the 1st of August working steadily and bravely at the same business. She had come to be pretty well known in Lawrence, where she had arrived as a total stranger not so many months before. John P. Ridgway, who would have been a good friend to her, was far away. He had been drafted off as a soldier—not having adopted the desperate measure of drawing his front teeth—and though he had not Heaton's dreamy enthusiastic patriotism, he had plenty of pride, and determined, as he must be a soldier, to be the best there was going. And that is just what he was, about the best cavalry soldier that ever threw a leg across a saddle. He was far away in Tennessee and knew nothing about Nancy's coming to Lawrence. She did not lack for friends, however. Far from it.

The persons who frequented the new eating house were mostly teamsters; that is to say, young men who carried freight to and fro between Lawrence and the neighbouring towns. These were not slow to find out what a charming landlady it was who presided at the little eating house. Such attractive girls did not often appear before their delighted eyes, and it is not an exaggeration to say that Nancy might have been engaged every week to a new suitor if she had permitted half of

the men to make love to her who evinced a desire to do so. At last she fairly took flight from her too ardent admirers and devoted herself to the kitchen, while Susannah was sent in to wait on the men at dinner. Under the steady influence of hard work, the mad mulatto woman had settled down into being a quiet and fairly efficient servant. She never gave way now to those crazy outbursts of excitement, and Nancy hoped she was going to get over them altogether.

Suddenly one day Susannah was reduced to a state of helpless abject terror by the appearance of a new guest at the eating house. He was a tall man of about thirty-five, wearing the ordinary big hat, red shirt, and heavy riding boots of the plains. There was nothing remarkable about him. He seemed a well set up, vigorous man with face bronzed by long exposure to the elements. He had a stern look, and his dark eyebrows met in a frown, but one sometimes sees this expression in people of the gentlest character if the skin of their forehead be loose and easily moved. This man came in a short time before dinner and sat down, thus intimating his desire to partake of the forthcoming meal. No sooner did Susannah see him than she dropped the pitcher of water she was carrying to the table and fled screeching to the kitchen. Nancy was keenly annoyed. She found it impossible to quiet the woman or to discover the cause of her outburst. Nothing remained, therefore, but for her to go into the dining room herself, leaving Susannah in charge of the kitchen, thus reversing their respective duties.

Nancy's appearance, as unexpected as it was welcome, was the signal for a volley of delighted exclamations and comments from the assembled men, to most of whom she was well known and to many of whom she was an object of hopeless devotion. The stranger looked up at the commotion and his eyes encountered Nancy's.

"By thunder!" he exclaimed, starting to his feet.

Nancy started too and turned very white, but she did not drop the dish of beans she was carrying; she only gripped it the tighter.

"Wal, stranger, I guess you're surprised at something," remarked the man opposite, eying him sternly.

"I was for a moment," said the newcomer, sitting down again, but not taking his eyes off Nancy.

She had regained her colour and something more than was usual, for her cheeks glowed brightly and her eyes seemed to sparkle. The men gazed at her in admiration; only the new guest frowned as well as stared. Some of the rejected ones felt this to be an indirect insult to their bewitching landlady, and would in a moment have made it the ground for picking up a quarrel then and there, only they knew that Nancy didn't allow any brawls to take place at her table. They accordingly endeavoured to be sarcastic.

"Wal, stranger, guess this is your fust visit to Lawrence, anyhow," commented a young fellow who sat opposite the glum visitor.

"No, sir, I've been here before."

"Sorter 'lowed as you hadn't seed Miss Nancy afore, as you was kinder surprised."

"I have seen Miss Nancy Overton often."

"Land! Miss Nancy didn't look as she was all-fired glad to see you."

"I don't inquire into the reasons of ladies' doings, but I always do of men," replied the black-browed stranger with unmistakable enmity. Silence fell upon the guests, who plied their knives with speed and effectiveness. Nancy waited upon them without a word. When the dinner was over, all the men rose to go about their several affairs. Only the stranger remained behind, obstinately sitting on his bench, staring vacantly

up at the rafters of the low room, bent on outstaying every one else. With many a wrathful glance his late table associates passed him and went out, and finally when they were all gone he got up and walked boldly into the small kitchen. Susannah fled at the sight of him out through the back door and hid behind the wood pile. Nancy held her ground, although a close observer would have seen that she was both nervous and frightened at his presence.

“Nancy, has it come to this?” he said, with more gentleness of manner than any one would have thought him capable of from the roughness and gruffness he had maintained in the dining room.

“I am living here. I have done so for some time,” answered Nancy very quietly.

“As drudge to rough teamsters?”

“No; as a free woman who is working for her living,” retorted she, with something of her old spirit coming back to her.

“I don’t see any difference. You are a mere servant to these men.”

“I am not. I am mistress of this house, and I allow in this room only those whom I choose,” she said with suggestive firmness.

“I ain’t going to get angry with you, Nancy,” he resumed in a conciliatory manner, “but you can’t stay here. I advise you to leave as soon as you can.”

“James Harte, you forget who you are talking to,” said Nancy haughtily. “I don’t leave my own home at the order of a stranger, I can tell you.”

“I wish you wouldn’t call me a stranger. I mean well by you,” answered Harte, for it was he who had so strangely appeared at Nancy’s eating house.

“I am sure you do,” said she, at once softening.

He seemed at a loss how to proceed. He looked around, frowned, appeared on the point of speaking, and

finally got up, saying he would come again in the evening.

"I want to talk with you, Nancy, so don't have any of those men around. It will be the worse for them and for you."

He spoke in a masterful way, to which Nancy was but little accustomed and which grated on her proud spirit.

"If you want to see me for a short while I can spare the time after the work is over. Come at eight o'clock," she said, not daring to refuse to see him and yet dreading his visit keenly. She suspected that he wanted to renew his suit, and she considered that if he was going to live in Lawrence it might be just as well to get it over once for all and to make him clearly understand that she could never listen to him. There was a curious note in Harte's manner that Nancy failed to explain to herself—an air of command, as if his impetuous temper had been growing in its self-assertion until now it would brook no denial. He had a careless air of peremptoriness, as if he was in the habit of ordering men about and of being obeyed. She looked forward, therefore, to the evening's talk with no little trepidation.

Punctual to the minute there he was, looking, if possible, sterner than ever, with the black frown deepening over his eyes. It was a handsome face, but one that was not pleasant to look upon, for there were possibilities of cruelty lurking about that set mouth, and the blue-gray eyes looked as if they could be relentless enough. James Harte had changed a good deal since Nancy last saw him, and he had changed for the worse. Life was not softening his rugged nature, but was casting it into harder and more immovable lines.

"I guess you don't forget what we talked about the last time I saw you down in Missouri," said Harte, seating himself opposite Nancy and looking her squarely in

the face. His eyes were not those to sink before any one's, whether man's or woman's.

"Yes, I remember, James, and no doubt you remember what my answer was. It is the same now."

"I hadn't inquired about that yet," said Harte with a slight sneer.

Nancy flushed at this taunt.

"I guess you're a regular out and out free-state woman by this time?" was his next somewhat unlooked-for observation.

"I am more against slavery than ever. This war doesn't make folks love it. I should think even you might understand that. I suppose you are secesh, aren't you? The war is costing us all that is nearest and dearest," said Nancy earnestly.

"Exactly. And I reckon you'd be glad to do anything you could to save the folks on your side, eh?"

Nancy looked at him inquiringly, but did not reply.

"Now I'm coming to the point where we left off in Missouri three years ago. You wouldn't marry me then, because you didn't care about me, and I couldn't offer you enough to make you care about me. Things are changed now, Nancy. There ain't many things I can't offer you that a woman would want, and I say I love you all the same. You are the only girl I ever saw with a spirit I could admire. I've seen enough girls that would have been willing and glad to have me, but I don't want a mean-spirited, clinging wife. I want a wife with a spice of the devil in her, like you, Nancy. I don't believe there's anything would frighten you, by gosh, and I admire that, I do."

Nancy listened in speechless amazement to this extraordinary declaration of love.

"You don't seem to have understood what I said," she observed at length.

"Yes, I understood right enough," he interrupted, and then continued in the same measured, stern voice, as if he were reading out the rules of punishment to a mutinous regiment. "You don't love me, and you think you won't marry me. Well, women often marry men they don't particularly care for, if the men can give them something they do care for very much. Now I can do this. You are a free-state woman, and you would like your own folks round here to escape the horrors of war. Listen. If you'll marry me I'll give you the town of Lawrence—the property and the lives of the people safe. There ain't another girl 'twixt here and Memphis can boast of an offer like that."

Nancy was frightened. She felt sure the man was mad. She was alone, and he looked black and stern enough for any piece of devilry. She gazed at him fascinated with fear—she whom he had been just praising as a girl who was afraid of nothing.

"What's your answer?"

"I don't understand what you mean. How can you give me Lawrence?"

"I can give it to you, and I will do so, by God, if you'll marry me. But you must be quick. Maybe I'm playing with my life, and most folks would say I was a darned fool too; all for the sake of a girl who don't care one wink of her bright eyes for me. You must answer quick and straight, for I ain't the man to dangle round a woman's skirts, even if it's you. You must say yes or no to-night. To-morrow it will be too late; I shall be gone. If you'll come away with me in the morning we'll get married right away. I'll give you Lawrence, the lives of the men, the homes of the women and children. Say yes, Nancy, and you won't regret it. You'll have done more for your folks and the side you take than two hundred soldiers; there ain't another woman between the Potomac and the Mississippi could do half as

much. Say no, and your life won't be long enough for your remorse."

The danger was very near, but mad or no, Nancy must meet him, and she did so with a direct refusal. He stopped, and she could hear him breathing heavily while his nostrils twitched. She knew the furious temper of old, and wondered where the storm would break, and how she should withstand it.

"Think again, Nancy. Lawrence against a girl's fancy," he said, making an effort to control himself.

"I don't believe a word of what you say, James Harte. You think to frighten me into marrying you by this bugbear of a story."

"It's the truth, I swear to God it is," he interrupted.

"Lawrence isn't yours. I don't know what you mean by 'giving' it to me. Free cities don't lie in the hollow of a man's hand, like an ear of corn."

"Don't it, by thunder! Lawrence does lie in the hollow of my hand, and I can give it to you as a wedding gift, or I can——"

"You are raving mad, James Harte, and I won't listen to any more of your wild words," interrupted Nancy vehemently, as she saw the door open and two of her oldest and most respected boarders come into the apartment. Never before did she look upon their rough faces with such joy. Harte turned with a smothered oath, and in a few moments rose to leave the room. As he said good-bye he repeated under his breath:

"Think again, Nancy. I give you one more chance."

"Never!" said she boldly, confident now her friends were near.

"Then damn Lawrence and you!" said Harte, furiously grinding his teeth as he strode from the room to the great relief of Nancy. What he had meant by his threats or whether he had meant anything, she did not

stop to inquire; she was only thankful he was gone, never, she hoped, to return.

Try as she might to dismiss all memory of him from her mind, the recollection of his threats was soon forced upon her, for the air was full of rumours. Vague whispers went about, anxious inquiries were made which none could answer. One of those chronic periods of excitement and suspense was creeping upon Lawrence when the word "raid" was passed from mouth to mouth. The teamsters at the eating house talked loudly about it and continuously, and the news was not long in reaching Nancy in the midst of her beans and bacon and her hot soda biscuits. It came upon her that perhaps this might be the explanation of James Harte's curious threat and still more curious offer. She spoke about it to some of her boarders. They were convinced he was a spy, and were consequently full of regret that they hadn't "dropped him on sight." Word passed around that spies were abroad, and this did not tend to allay the excitement. Help was asked from Fort Leavenworth, and two cannon came lumbering along, only to be met by orders from headquarters to go home again, so they lumbered back. Such is military prescience. General Collamore, the mayor, heard reports of Nancy's late visitor, and the eating house was amazed to see him on horseback prance up to its modest door. Nancy was summoned from her pumpkin pies, and appeared with bare arms and a snowy dab of flour like a white rose ornamenting her black hair. The mayor, being but a man, smiled at the pretty young landlady and called her "my dear."

He inquired minutely into the appearance and tactics of the spy she was supposed to have had under her roof, and Naney with a sweet blush told him of James Harte's singular offer of marriage.

"And you said no, didn't you?" asked the mayor,

distinctly amused at what he took to be a lover's stratagem.

"Of course I refused," answered Nancy.

"Quite right, my dear. You are far too pretty for a rascally butternut. You just wait until the gallant boys in blue come marching home victorious, and then you choose a dashing soldier for yourself," said the cheerful mayor.

A look of such unmistakable pain passed over the young girl's sweet face that the kindly mayor saw he had touched what was perhaps an aching wound.

"My child," he said gently, "you have chosen a loyal soldier already. I trust all goes well with him."

"I don't know. He went away long ago," she said quietly.

"God grant he may come back safe to you!"

The mayor rode away, feeling that, except for the pleasure of looking upon a very pretty face and hearing a sweet young voice, he had certainly wasted some of the public time which might have been better employed in arranging for the defence of the town.

The excitement continued to increase. People went about in fear and trembling. Arms were collected at the courthouse, and every man was ordered to go there upon the first appearance of danger. Two or three companies of State militia came in from neighbouring towns and idled around the streets.

Nothing happened.

The hot days scorched along, and scouts returning from the direction of Franklin and the border reported all quiet there. The overland mail ran unmolested through Black Jack and steeled off toward the limitless West in a continuous cloud of dust of its own raising.

The little eating house stood on the very western limit of Lawrence, an isolated shanty in its own plot of

ground. Just behind it was a large field of corn, now in its summer height, with great nodding plumes of florescence on the ends of its lofty stalks. Occasionally, when there was a little wind stirring, Nancy used to listen to the rustle of the large ribbonlike leaves. It reminded her of the sound of the trees down in Missouri, a sound she had not often heard since coming to Kansas, and it was welcome to her as a memory of brighter days. The weeks passed, and the idea of a raid being imminent passed also. Nobody saw any sign of the gathering storm, and the military authorities at Kansas City were cheerfully serene. Lawrence had been so often frightened that people began to laugh at her fears. The militiamen laughed loudest, and, turning back disgusted, went home to their farm work again, confident in the strength of the soldiers to stop raiders from coming over the border. The panic was over, and Lawrence went about its manifold business on the 20th of August, and expected to do so on the next and following days.

Early hours used to obtain on the prairie, and Nancy was just opening the door at half past five on the morning of the 21st to intimate that breakfast would be ready in half an hour, when her "chore boy" bounced in, absolutely green with terror. This was a young darky who used to draw water from the well and fetch and carry generally for the household.

"Oh, Lordy, Lordy!" he cried, trying to creep under the table.

"What's the matter with you, Hercky? Has anybody beaten you?" asked Nancy, surprised at his conduct.

"Oh, Lordy, Lordy! I seed 'em," replied the demoralized Hercules incomprehensibly.

"Seen who?"

"De bushwhackers ridin' 'long by de breshwood," said the shivering lad.

"Nonsense! They were some of our troops. We are going to have soldiers here now. Get out from under the table and draw the water for breakfast. I want three bucketfuls."

Hercules arose trembling and went to the well, his eyes rolling horribly in his head. Nancy watched him in scornful amusement for a second. He let down the bucket and had begun to wind up the windlass when his rolling eyes caught sight of some object that caused him violent emotion.

"Oh, Lordy, dar dey is! I know dem butternuts. Oh, Lordy!"

Without delay he sprang back out of reach of the windlass, let go the handle, and fled. The released handle flew violently round as the bucket fell back with a splash into the well. Hercules was out of sight in the cornfield, and a negro in a cornfield is as impossible to find as the proverbial needle in a bundle of hay. The corn was eight feet high, growing like sturdy bamboos covered with broad leaves, and the field contained forty acres. Five hundred men could hide in such a place.

"Well, to be sure, talk of ghosts and the fear thereof!" said Nancy, smiling at the flight of the redoubtable Hercules. She went herself to the well and began to wind up the bucket, but something caught her eye, for she turned very white. She did not let go the handle, but wound at it for dear life, and then left it standing on the edge of the well and ran back into the house, all of a tremble.

"Susannah, the woods are full of bushwhackers! I saw them. Oh, what shall we do?" she said, with the instinct of a woman, which is to ask for help in the first moment of danger.

"Ain't I got my flapjacks light wid de beating?" said Susannah inconsequently. Her mind was set to cooking, and could not be moved therefrom without

some external excitement. This impetus was not lacking on the present occasion. A moment after the town rang with yells, shouts, and the quick reports of pistol shots.

Nancy went to shut the door with a view to placing that feeble barrier between her and the danger.

“Oh, Lordy, Lordy, dar’s ole man Quantrell!” shrieked Susannah, and the name seemed to be taken up by a hundred voices. “Quantrell! Quantrell!” was echoed back from the houses.

A tall man on a big horse galloped by the door. Nancy saw him as he flashed by.

“I am Quantrell! Down with the blue-bellied Yankees! Shoot every one!”

The figure was that of James Harte, but the face was that of a devil.

They swarmed in from everywhere. The Waukarusa woods seemed to yield up men like falling leaves, so great was the multitude. They thundered up Main Street, firing right and left. Their horses bounded over the ground, and at every bound there was a shot sent into some door or window. Straight on to the new hotel they rushed as the big gong sounded, calling the guests from their beds. It was a rueful awakening. In batches and squads they were marched out, and many were shot down on the pavement, a few paces away from the house where they had lately been peacefully sleeping. Men were summoned to open their doors, and a quick shot was the death-dealing visitor they admitted. Women came tremblingly forth clasping their children in their arms, and the raiders first looted and then burned their houses.

Lawrence, which had made ready for repelling an attack three weeks before, was now caught totally unarmed and unprepared. Arms and ammunition were locked up in fatal security in the courthouse, and that

Quantrell had seized. It was not for nothing that the raider chief had come into Lawrence to see how the land lay and to note where his attack should be delivered. In the intervals of his strange wooing of Nancy he had not been idle.

There was no resistance, no fighting even, only a string of murders enduring nearly all day. Nancy remained for some hours in her house, dreading to leave it and yet fearful of remaining. The flying townsfolk made for the woods. Some got there, some crept into the ravine overgrown with brushwood which bisects the town. They were pursued by the raiders to the very edge of this ravine, but no one dared explore it. Desperate men, driven at bay in a thicket, were not the prey the raiders cared to face. Scores of fugitives made for the cornfield behind Nancy's house. Poor panting creatures with glaring bloodshot eyes rushed wildly past her door and leaped into the kindly shelter of the tall growing maize. After them came the butternuts begirt with pistols, firing at every step. Running aim is not a steady aim, so most of the fugitives gained the cornfield; a few who were wounded were overtaken and shot in the very verge of the safe retreat.

The sun rose higher and higher over the unhappy town. Not a breath of air was there to stir a leaf or to give movement to the dense suffocating smoke from the burning of the wooden houses. The heat was intolerable, and those wretched fugitives cowering in the cornfield were going mad with thirst. The baking sun beat straight down on them now, the bamboolike stems of the corn giving no help and no shadow. Some of them crept cautiously to the edge next Nancy's house. They called to her in timorous tones.

“Water!” was their cry. “Give us water, for God’s sake!”

Nancy heard the prayer, and hearing, answered it.

She took bucket after bucket of cool life-giving water from her well down into the sweltering cornfield to the gasping fugitives hiding there. Coming out after one of these journeys of mercy, she found a troop of Missourians ransacking her house preparatory to setting it on fire.

“What have you got in that cornfield?” they asked her.

“Go in and see,” she replied haughtily. “Go; you will find it the hottest place you’ve been in to-day. Try it.”

“Maybe it’s the State militia coming up,” suggested one of the raiders, who was employed in smashing Nancy’s simple furniture.

The words State militia set them furious.

“Tell us or we’ll throw you down the well. Who’s in there?”

“Go. You’ll find out,” replied Nancy dauntlessly, well knowing that the best chance she had of screening the fugitives was by letting the raiders imagine the field concealed the militia.

“Take her to Quantrell. He’ll know how to make her speak,” said one of the ruffians, evidently half drunk.

She was seized in a moment and swung upon a horse. The rest of the party mounted fast. Susannah, scared from the house by the flames, at this instant rushed out with her clothes on fire. Nancy tried to spring down from the horse and go to her assistance.

“Are you fiends in human shape that you can see a woman burn to death?” she cried in horror.

“Reckon I can quiet her screeches, anyhow,” said one of the raiders, drawing his pistol and firing at the frantic woman.

“Quit that, you damn fool! The chief don’t ‘low killin’ o’ women,” roared a companion, who was evi-

dently a beginner at the work. The mulatto woman fell in a heap on the ground, and the last speaker took off his wide-brimmed hat and flapped out the flames.

“Nigger women don’t count in any orders as I know on,” said the one who had fired, as he sulkily put up his weapon.

“You’ll bring Quantrell down on us, you blamed fool!” scolded the other.

“I’ll bring my revolver down on you this minute and let the daylight into you if you dare say another word to me,” returned his fraternal companion in arms.

Nancy made another effort to break away and go to Susannah’s assistance, but a bird caught in a net was not more powerless than she. The men made sport of her frantic despair and without difficulty held her powerless. Resigning herself to the inevitable, she remained sullenly quiet. One hopeless glance she cast back toward Susannah, who lay prone upon the ground, whether dead or not she could not say. Thus Nancy was separated from the last of her former slaves, from those poor creatures for whom she had sacrificed so much. Amid smoke and flame, a captive among brutal raiders, she disappeared from her little eating house in Lawrence toward the middle of the day when that luckless dwelling, together with half of the town, disappeared off the face of the earth.

CHAPTER XXIII

NANCY MISSING

THIS, then, was the sight that met Heaton's eye as he looked down upon Lawrence, a black, smoking mass in the centre of the town, and here and there red glowing flames where some of the houses last set on fire were slowly consuming their timbers. He was a soldier and had seen two years and a half of active warfare, he knew the grim details of his terrible profession very thoroughly, but never before had he experienced such a heart-sickening shock as when he looked down upon Lawrence on that summer day. He knew at a glance what had happened as well as if he had been told. It had been raided.

A town that is burned by accident looks very different in its ruins from the town that is burned by the hand of the foe. In the former case the fire burns from one great centre, and the inhabitants, like ants, rudely disturbed in their nests, are seen hurrying hither and thither in endless confusion. The town that is purposely fired burns from many isolated points—here, there, everywhere—and the inhabitants, if there are any to be seen, are neither noisy nor numerous. Many are dead, more have fled, and those that remain are too terrified and too overwhelmed to make loud lament. A few women who have lost all may be heard pitifully wailing over the dead bodies of their husbands and sons, or they may be seen miserably searching among the

blackened ruins of their homes for some relic more precious than life.

Where was Nancy? An awful fear clutched at his heart, for he knew that although war is not waged against women, still a pretty and helpless young girl had a thousand dangers to meet in the sacking of a town by a band of irregular troops. Alas, poor Charlie, what a home-coming from the wars was this!

Leaving Aunt Monin with the wagon and horses in the woods at the edge of the town, he and Sambo went forward cautiously, not knowing what might be the state of affairs. Sambo, not the bravest of mortals as we know, was from his inordinate vanity made stalwart on this occasion. He would not show cowardice before Mas'r Capting Heaton, and marched therefore sturdily alongside of his commanding officer, keeping a lynx-eyed watch on every side. He espied the skulking fugitives in the brushwood of the gorge, and at first thought them the enemy, but a nearer inspection showed him his mistake. The people, moreover, were beginning to come forth, assured as they were by the women that the raiders were gone.

Then began the search for Nancy. No one in the distracted groups he questioned seemed to have heard her name, or else they had lost all memory of everything except their own immediate sorrows. Most of them indeed were looking for their own dead. One piteous father was frantically tearing at the red-hot cinders of his own house, trying to find some trace of his lost son. Poor father! Better for him if a kindly earth could have hidden what he found from his sight, leaving him with only the memory of his son living and in the first glow of his young manhood. In his two years and a half of soldiering Heaton had more than once searched a battlefield. He had sought the shattered remnants of his company after the repulse from Corinth. He knew

what it was to look for comrades among the disfigured bodies that dotted many a hard-fought field. His heart was not hardened by his war experience, but his nerves were steadied, so that he could look on unmoved at awful sights. But in all the battlefields he had searched it was only for soldiers and fighting men he looked. He had never hunted among the dead for the one he loved best on earth. That he might have to do among the blistering ruins of Lawrence, and his eyes were blinded with a burning agony of tears and his hands quivered as if he were new to the work and had not seen thousands of men die around him more than once.

It could not be that Nancy, whose bright young figure rose before his memory so distinctly, was among those shapeless and charred masses that people were beginning to remove from among the ruins of the burned buildings. The thought was too horrible. He would not let it come into his mind. Still, amid the confusion he could not find any one who knew her or had ever heard of her little eating house, and thus he too wandered up and down Massachusetts Street half distracted with anxiety, while the weeping women were mourning over their dead laid out on the pathway. Sambo rushed hither and thither in a state of frantic grief, calling upon all and sundry to give him information with truly irregularized negro vehemence. By this time even the negroes began to take heart of grace and to creep forth out of their hiding places, and Sambo immediately pounced upon a couple, demanding to know "whar Miss Nancy done live?" There is a freemasonry among negroes and a power of quick interchange of news that amazes white people, who depend on the papers to do this for them. Sambo demanded news of the darkies, and they instantly supplied it. Thus it was he who discovered where the little eating house had stood, and

thither he and Heaton rushed with panting eagerness. They found the house smoking in its ruins, and lying in the yard was Susannah where she had fallen when shot by the Missourian. The near approach of death had cleared the blurred vision of the poor creature. When the two men spoke to her she looked up and instantly recognised them.

“My poor woman, can I help you?” asked Heaton pitifully.

“No, Mas’r Heaton, I’se mos’ done wid dish wicked worl’.”

“Who are you?” asked the young man, astonished at being recognised.

“I’se Miss Nancy’s Susanner.”

“Where is she?” gasped he, kneeling down beside her to catch the feeble words. “Tell me. What has become of her? Did she escape?”

“No, Mas’r Heaton, she’s in de han’s o’ de raiders. Dey done tote her off on hoss.”

“Oh, my God!” cried the unfortunate young man to whom this answer carried an awful significance.

“Which way did they go? How long are they gone? Can you tell me?”

“Dey go a while back,” said Susannah faintly. “It war Mas’r Jeemes Harte what done de raid. I seed him ride in.”

“Dat de same as ole man Quantrell what run we uns off an’ burn Miss Nancy’s farm,” said Sambo. “Mas’r Jeemes won’t go fer ter hurt her, ’cause he wanted ter marry her down in ole Missouri.”

As consolation this news carried a sting in it for Heaton.

“Sambo, stay with this poor woman and do what you can for her. I’m going to start the pursuit,” said Heaton briefly. “Good-bye, Susannah; I’ll try and bring Miss Nancy back to you.”

He walked rapidly off in the direction of the woods, where his wagon and horses were.

“Sambo, yo’ go ‘long too,” said Susannah. “Yo’ can len’ a han’ in de fight. Yo’ can’t do nuffin fer me. I’se gwine dish night inter paradise. I done seed my ole man what war killed at Mine Creek. He mighty kin’, an’ he beckon ter me fer ter hurry up. An’ Sambo he got de babby in de arms, an’ dat chile he jess as fat an’ cute as he can be. I’se powerful curious fer ter hurry up, an’ I ‘low I ain’t gwine ter be long agoin’.”

The dying woman began to babble about her little baby. Sambo was eager to follow Mas’r Heaton and to be forward in the rescue of Miss Nancy, but dared not disobey orders. He hesitated what to do. At this moment a small darky came creeping out of the corn-field. This was the redoubtable Hercules, who seeing Sambo standing there came to the conclusion that the butternuts must be gone and that he might safely venture forth.

“Is yo’ huntin’ fer Miss Nancy?” he inquired.

“Yaas, sonny, come hyar an’ tell me whar she gone,” said Sambo eagerly.

“Down yonder,” said the boy, jerking his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the river.

“War dar powerful heap on ‘em?”

“Nary heap; on’y four men. I seed ‘em goin’ ‘long de track down by de ribber. I seed ‘em from de corn-fiel’.”

Hercules brought some water in his hat and streamed it over the dying woman’s face and hands to cool her burning wounds, but she was past all suffering. The water, however, seemed to revive her for the moment. Susannah, who had appeared all but dead, opened her eyes, and, seeing the two negroes there, spoke again:

“Sambo, go ‘long an’ help save Miss Nancy,” she said jerkily. “Tell her de ole mad nigga woman ain’t

mad now. She gwine ter der place whar de Lo'd keep her babby-chile safe for her. Go 'long, Sambo."

She relapsed into unconsciousness. They waited for the end. Suddenly raising herself, she spoke in a loud clear voice that startled them dreadfully.

"What for yo' don't go an' save her? De raiders carry her down to de big ribber whar de water run deep an' swif'. Dey's gwine ter drown her. Save dat po' chile."

Sambo gazed at her in a fascinated sort of fright as she sank back again. She was evidently breathing her last.

"Yo' nigga," exclaimed Hercules, gripping Sambo by the arm, "dat what de butternuts gwine ter do. Dey's gwine ter drown Miss Nancy. Oh, Lordy, Lordy! Dey hain't toted her by de big road to Franklin; dey done go by de track down 'long de ribber. Ole man got de rope roun' de saddle horn, an' dey tie her han's behin' her back an' carry her off on de brown hoss. Lordy, Lordy!"

"Is yo' shu'?" asked Sambo in a terrified voice.

"Dey's gwine ter drown her," sobbed Hercules, who was very much attached to Nancy. "Drown her in de deep hole roun' beyon' de maple trees dar. I seed de rope on de saddle horn."

The terrors that Hercules expressed with such vehemence infected Sambo. He did not stay to reason. Miss Nancy was in danger, and he, Sambo, must fly to the rescue. His first and only idea was to let Captain Heaton know. He captured a stray mule by a dexterity known only to a negro, and, leaping upon its astonished back, drove it by means of his flapping hat with a speed which only a negro can get out of a mule.

Believing that Nancy was in the hands of a former lover from Missouri, Heaton could not bring himself to imagine that any immediate harm would come to her,

whatever might be the distant result. Southern men did not often molest women. Therefore his plan was to organize a pursuit as rapidly as possible, and for this purpose he was proceeding to Blanton in order to assemble men whose nerves had not been so shaken as was the case with the newly raided citizens of Lawrence. He thought it highly probable that from there he might, with even a small body of men, intercept the raiders, who would infallibly retreat by the Franklin road. He had not gone far in this direction when he was overtaken by the frantic Sambo on the barebacked mule.

“Lordy, Lordy! Mas’r Capting Heaton, he done tote her off ter der ribber fer ter drown her. Ole Susanner and de nigga tole me so,” was the appalling message he delivered as soon as he got within shouting distance. Never before or since was a team driven with such furious speed as when Charlie Heaton, standing up in his wagon, lashed his horses along the road leading to the river followed by Sambo, urging on his mule with his flapping hat. What Heaton intended to do was not very clear in his own mind. He was too frantic to think or make any plan. Somewhere along that river bank Nancy was drowning, and he would save her or perish in the attempt. Men joined him as he dashed along, men who seemed to pick up the news from the air, or maybe it was from Sambo on the mule. They began to gather and to come swiftly by that pretty road that skirts the Kaw River, where the trees dip down into the clear water and tone its reflecting surface with their brilliant tints. A man coming out of the bush, and recognising that these were friends that now swept along, hailed him.

“Stranger, halt there a minute. There’s a gang o’ bushwhackers just a little while back carried a girl down to the bend in the river. They were all pretty drunk and I——”

Heaton leaped from the wagon.

"Which way? Those are the ones we're after.—Sambo, here take this knife and do what you can to save Miss Nancy." Quick, sharp, and soldierlike were his orders, but Heaton's face was ghastly to look upon and his eyes glared. His long thin hands were like eagle's claws and savagely gripped his weapons. He and Sambo crept into the brushwood in the direction indicated by their informant. After them came Aunt Monin, crawling along like a fox, making no noise. Two or three more had come up by this time, and they too entered the bush at different points, so as to make sure of catching the bushwhackers.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE RESCUE

WHEN Nancy had been led by her ruffian captors to their "chief" she had at first experienced a feeling of relief on beholding that he was none other than James Harte. The name of Quantrell had filled her with well-founded alarm, but when she saw that it belonged to her old admirer James Harte she could not help feeling that he at least would allow no harm to be done to her. Perhaps this might have been so had Harte been in full possession of his faculties at this moment, but such was not the case. Nancy had some difficulty in recognising him even, he was so altered from what he had been a few days before when he had made her the strange offer of Lawrence if she would accept him. She understood him now, and she realized how truthfully exact was his boast that he held the town in the hollow of his hand. He was now grimy-looking and dirty with the smoke of battle, but it was not the filth of his person that alarmed Nancy, it was the awful bloodshot glare of his eye. Standing on the ruins of the town he had destroyed, he was giving his orders for the withdrawal of his men when Nancy was brought up.

"Take everything you like and burn the rest; then light out for the border."

"Here's suthin ye'll like to take 'long, captain. She's bin givin' information to folks down in the corn-field over yonder. Maybe it's militia's thar," said one of

Nancy's captors, thrusting her forward until she stood within a couple of feet of Quantrell. He glared at her with a savage scowl.

"So, ho! You've come to your senses, have you?" he said with a jerk between his words that showed he had been drinking.

"James Harte, what have you done?" said Nancy sternly, hoping to overawe him with the steadiness of her manner. Poor girl! If that was her only defence it was not worth much.

"I'm Quantrell, by thunder! Let no one dare to call me anything else or I'll let the daylight into him pretty quick," was his answer, which showed Nancy that to try and reason with him in his present condition was utterly useless, and might be very dangerous. She looked helplessly around the group, but every face bore the mark of that increase of savagery that is obtained by a free use and abuse of whisky. Silence was the safest thing for her under these circumstances. Accordingly, she remained silent while the final orders were being given. Then she was hoisted on to a horse in front of a big man who spoke only a few words, but these betrayed his German origin. This individual appeared to be Quantrell's right-hand man.

A helter-skelter troop streamed out of Lawrence, a good many taking the Franklin road, others again going almost due east. To break up the band seemed to be their purpose, so that each party might the more readily escape into Missouri with the booty. A few well-loaded wagons moved forward as fast as possible, followed by a rabble on horseback, for the men were now so drunk and noisy they had lost all semblance of military order and discipline. Some distance behind this last band came Quantrell with his captive, his German lieutenant, and a few others. Nancy had no other thought but that they would carry her off into Missouri,

and she hoped that when once there better feelings would prevail, and that she might eventually be set free. But when she saw that her captors were leaving both the Franklin road and the main body of their party, and were making for the river by a track that followed its banks, her heart gave a great throb of terror. They were not going to take her into Missouri.

What were they going to do with her?

She asked the German who was riding behind her on the big horse, but he only laughed, and his laugh had an evil sound in it. He, like the rest, reeked of whisky. She made a sudden movement as if to throw herself from the horse, and found to her dismay that not only were her hands bound, but that she was also tied to the German by a rope around his waist. She did not know when he had slipped the cord around her. She tried to look back at Quantrell, but he was riding straight behind, and she could only hear the tapping of his horse's feet on the ground.

By and bye they reached the river flowing along under the sunlit trees. It flashed across her that they were going to drown her in their drunken fury and rage. Therefore they had brought her to this lonely spot, so as to be out of reach of the possible pity and interference of the less savage of the raiders. She was young, and the smooth-gliding, treacherous river would soon close over her and tell no tale. A choking lump rose in her throat. This, then, was the end. She had come here to die alone. It was not maybe the worst fate that might befall her. She would meet death calmly, and her haughty spirit rose. She would not lower herself to beg her life from these drunken ruffians. Her prayers would be rare sport for them to flout. She could and she would balk them of that brutal delight.

They followed along by the river brink for some way until they came to a sort of clearing where a wood-

cutter must have lately been at work, for a cord of wood was piled near by. Here they dismounted, lifted her from her horse and tied her to a tree. They were four men who now confronted Nancy—James Harte, the sullen German, and two others—all four more or less drunk. The two who were more drunk were perhaps a shade less cruel than the two who retained more of the tiger in their rage.

“Well,” said James Harte, speaking with less firmness and rapidity of enunciation than Nancy had ever heard him speak before, “I reckon you know now I’m a man of my word, don’t you?”

Nancy looked at him with wide-eyed terror, but did not reply to this vague question.

“I offered you Lawrence if you’d marry me, didn’t I? Offered you many lives, didn’t I, if you’d say yes and marry me?”

“And I said no,” answered Nancy firmly, meeting his gaze unflinchingly.

“You did. Reckon you thought I wasn’t going to keep my word; but I did. I offered you all those lives for your answer. I’m coming down in my bargain now. I’ll offer you only one life to-day—your own. Maybe that’ll make you listen to reason. Will you marry me, Nancy?”

He pointed with dread significance to the river. “It’s your own life against the answer. Remember that.”

“No, I will never marry you. Ruffian! Murderer! Drown me if you will; I can die.”

Her lips were colourless, but they neither faltered nor trembled as she hurled out her defiance.

Harte uttered a savage oath. He seemed to hesitate a moment, looked around, and, going up to the wood pile, said:

“That’s your answer, is it? Well, this is mine.”

He began to pull down the logs of wood from the pile, muttering something to the German, who helped him. The other two looked sulkily on, taking no part one way or the other.

Nancy had nerved herself to meet death calmly and with dignity, but it was death by drowning, where the merciful river would receive her into its bosom, and in a moment or two would close her life without sharp agony. She had not summoned her nerve to meet another and far more horrible death.

A wild cry burst from her colourless lips.

“O God! Are you going to burn me to death? Are you men born of women that you can stand and look on such a deed as that?” she added, appealing to the two who seemed mere spectators of the scene.

“No, I reckon I won’t look on,” replied one of the pair. “This ain’t what I joined this ride for. I’m going to git, I am.”

He walked deliberately off, mounted his horse, and rode away without once turning his head. His companion seemed undecided what to do. Quantrell and the German dragged the logs to the river’s edge, and the latter laughed as he did so. Quantrell was a man of fierce passions which three years of border ruffianism had brutalized, but he would never have done what he did had he not been inflamed by drink. He was enraged against Nancy, and his reason being obscured by drink, he did not distinctly understand what he was doing, nor the full savagery of the act. The German’s head was steadier; he, though also drunk, understood quite well what was on foot.

“Reckon I’ll sorter stan’ sentry down thar on the road, so as ter keep folks from spilin’ this picnic party,” observed the third ruffian, who had been standing looking on with slight show of interest in the proceedings of the other two. He accordingly walked off, leading his

horse away through the trees, leaving Nancy alone with the two men from whose rage she had most to dread.

The poor girl lived through a lifetime of agony as her terrified eyes fixed in an awful stare gazed at them pulling about the logs.

They made a platform of the timber, tying the logs together with their lariat ropes, and when thus tied they began to heave them into the water by means of a couple of poles. Once floating in the river, the logs of course spread out level and presented the upper surface of an uneven raft. A couple of light boughs were added transversely, and these two were also tied down to the rest of the logs. When the raft was thus complete the men laughed and seemed pleased at their work. Then they came to their prisoner tied to the tree, unfastened her, and rapidly placing her on the raft, shoved it off into the river by means of their poles.

So quick had been the climax that Nancy had scarcely time to realize that they were not going to burn her alive, as she at first imagined, before she found herself floating down the Kaw River on this frail bark. Her weight sent the logs down farther into the water, which rippled up between the openings and splashed around the ends. The current caught her and swung her soon into the middle of the stream, as, huddled in a heap with her face hidden in her hands, she started on her fearsome voyage. The two men laughed loud and long, as though they relished the complete success of their enterprise—a laugh that was heard by a stealthy negro creeping along in the brushwood.

That stealthy negro was Sambo, who, realizing that he was nearing some one, and most probably the very men they were in search of, crept off to warn Heaton, who was beating the bush close along the water's edge a little way back.

"Mas'r captin, I 'specks dey's yonder," said Sambo in a quick whisper. "I hearn 'em laugh, an' dar's hosses too."

Together they now crept forward cautiously, not knowing how many men there might be. A sudden surprise was their only chance. They heard the sound of horses as they came to the little clearing where the wood pile was all scattered about.

"There isn't any one here. You've made a mistake," said Heaton, preparing to rush on in further search.

"Dey was here, mas'r. Dem's fresh tracks," said Sambo, with negro instinct at once examining the ground. "Dish hyar water's muddy. Dey's bin foolin' in de ribber." He went to the water's edge, peering on the ground. Heaton examined the bank with feverish haste.

Suddenly Sambo nearly jumped into the river.

"Lordy, mas'r, see dat dar! Dar's a woman out on de planks. Look dar, gwine down de ribber! Lordy, it's Miss Nancy!"

Heaton looked, but with eyes that could not compete with a darky's telescopic vision. He saw, indeed, something on the water floating downstream.

Sambo screamed with excitement.

"Dat dar Miss Nancy fo' shu'. De nigga boy said dey was gwine ter drown her, and dat's de way dey done it!"

"Miss Nancy, yo ho!" he bawled as loud as he could, and Heaton too yelled, but the huddled figure on the raft did not move. Aunt Monin and a couple of men now came up through the bush and were added to the party.

"Yo', Aunt Monin, ain't dat dar a woman?" asked Sambo, catching her by the arm and pointing to that moving object on the face of the waters. Aunt

Monin brought her far-sighted old eyes to bear upon it for a moment, and said:

“Dat my honey-chile!”

Then she, too, sent a loud cry down the river after that forlorn figure on the raft. Heaton fired a couple of shots to attract her attention, but Nancy had heard too many cries and pistol shots on that fearsome day for her numbed brain to take any cognizance of either the one or the other. She never moved, but crouched despairingly on her narrow raft.

Then Aunt Monin came and stood in the very edge of the water, and, raising her old head high in the air, began to sing an old lullaby song with which long ago she used to hush Nancy to sleep. She had sung that tune hundreds of times to her foster child in the old days in Missouri, but never had she sung it as she did on this day, when her high-pitched, quavering old voice seemed filled with a more than human strength, as she sent the sounds wailing over the waters. Again and again she repeated the familiar refrain which crossed the river and seemed to echo back from the woods beyond. Downstream went the sound too, hurrying after Nancy, vibrating with familiar energy upon her dazed brain, and waking hope at last in her despairing heart. The sounds came she knew not whence—from heaven, maybe—but Nancy heard, and hearing, looked up and raised her head from her hands.

And thus she floated out of sight around a bend in the river, while old Aunt Monin sang on to the woods and her own heart.

She was alone, for Heaton was wildly dashing along the road on one of his horses, while Sambo followed on another. There was a sawmill, he was told, farther down, where he could get planks and boards, for boats there were none on the Kaw River. On, on, they rode,

their horses answering to the desperate whip, and after them came an ever-gathering troop.

A Lawrence woman out on the river! Cast adrift there to perish by the raiders!

The woods gave up their hiding fugitives, and they too joined in the rush for the sawmill, but none could overtake those two who rode so furiously in front.

With hurried, panting words the news was soon told, and eager hands were shoving planks into the river and lashing them together. Heaton, with a board in his hands and Sambo with another had hardly pushed off, when a shout came from higher up the banks: "She's coming! She's coming!"

It was all they could do with their clumsy paddles to bring their raft into the middle of the current and to keep it steady, while with straining eyes they sought to catch sight of that frail bark with its precious freight.

A small dark speck upon the shining river, floating down in midstream. How their hearts beat as they watched it coming nearer and nearer, until they could discern the little figure on the raft!

It was Nancy kneeling with clasped hands, her long black hair falling over her shoulders like a mantle. The raft neither swayed this way nor that, but steadily pursued its course down the middle of the river, where that other raft was waiting to catch the poor castaway.

Heaton carefully gauged its direction and stood fair in its course, as it floated down nearer and ever nearer. The moment it came within reach, lying fullstretch on his own raft, he seized a corner of the other, and, quickly passing a rope round the end log, lashed it in two places firmly to his own. Then he crept along the raft until he was beside Nancy, who seemed all the time as one in a dream.

The successive terrors of the day had nearly be-

numbed the poor girl's brain, so that when she heard the voice of her lover pouring disjointed words of love and thankfulness into her ears, she thought for a moment that the bitterness of dying must be passed, and that they had met on the other side of the river of death.

With infinite tenderness Heaton supported the poor little form in his loving arms, as the united rafts, guided by Sambo, moved slowly athwart the stream and were brought, lower down, safe to shore.

Some weeks later, in one of the unburned houses of Lawrence, a small party was assembled to witness a wedding. Aunt Monin was superintending that wedding, so we can guess whose it was, and she was instructing the minister who was to perform the ceremony as to what he was to say in his nuptial discourse.

"An' yo' had oughter 'sist 'pon de fac' how de Lo'd he 'p'int his own way fer ter 'venge himself," she observed, to the entire mystification of the poor man. "He don't go fer ter 'venge one killin' by anudder, like poor foolish man does. Dat ain't de way o' de Lo'd. He cleanse de han' o' de blood o' de father by lettin' it save de chile. Dat de way o' spiation he 'p'inted in his wisdom."

Needless to say, these points were not emphasized in the discourse delivered by the minister, an omission which surprised Aunt Monin, but one which she resolved to supplement at the first opportunity.

It was a fine sight to behold her in a most glorious new turban, standing behind her honey-chile on this supreme day when she was going to be united to the choice of her heart. Aunt Monin, impressionable like all her race, was full of excitement and feeling. Great tears flowed down her black cheeks as she stood behind her mistress, as quaint a bridesmaid as ever graced a

wedding. Her towering form, with its flaming topknot, entirely overshadowed Nancy, and went a good ways toward eclipsing Captain Heaton himself, tall as he was.

She wiped away the fast-falling tears with her big apron, and, turning a stern eye upon Sambo, who was doing duty as groomsman, said, in a voice clearly audible to every one present:

“ Yo’, Sambo, why don’t yo’ ‘joice? Dish hyar’s Miss Nancy’s weddin’, an’ if I catch yo’ snufflin’ I’ll bust yer two eyes inter one.”

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